

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Responsibility*

25 June 2023

### Call to Worship – Psalm 86

Bend down, O LORD, and hear my prayer;  
answer me, for I need your help.

**Protect me, for I am devoted to you.**

**Save me, for I serve you and trust you.**

**You are my God.**

O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive,  
so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.

**I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble,  
and you will answer me.**

No one is like you, O Lord.

None can do what you do!

**For you are great and perform wonderful deeds.**

**You alone are God. 1**

But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

**Look down and have mercy on me.**

**Give your strength to your servant;  
save me, the child of your servant.**

### Immortal, Invisible

*Walter Chalmers Smith*

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, the great and the small;  
Through all life Thou livest, the True Life of all;  
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,

And wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory; pure Father of light;  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;  
All praise we would render: O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Dear God

How I long for life to be simple

To not have to wrestle with the complexities of just getting through the day

Figuring out my finances

Planning my meals

Doing the laundry

Cleaning the house

All those daily chores are one thing

But then I have to work out people

What they want

When they want it

How they want it

And what about what I want?

Where does that fit in?

Why can't life be simple, God?

Then it occurs to me

You created me to be a complex being

Able to think and choose and make complex decisions

What would be the point of that if everything were simple?

In my longing for simple I miss the incredible person you have made me to be

Forgive me for taking all that I am for granted

For missing the amazing details of who and how I am

Help me to see me as you see me

And live well with all I am

We bring our private confessions to God...

Designer God, you know our frailties and failures intimately

Thank you for the forgiveness that you breathe upon us

Welcoming us as your loved children

Amen

## The Peace

### Reading

Genesis 21:8-15

<sup>8</sup>The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup>But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. <sup>10</sup>So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup>The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. <sup>13</sup>As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." <sup>14</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

### Reflection

There is so much that is wrong about this story. Let me try to make list of what I think is going wrong here. First up, slavery. There are some who argue that slavery was simply how things were done in those times. My response is that if slavery is wrong now, it was wrong then. Treating another human being as a chattel or piece of property is wrong.

Next, is the manner of Hagar, the slave, becoming pregnant. We can take this in two parts. Sarah, her mistress, gives her to Abraham with the intent of him having sex with her and producing an heir. If Hagar is a slave, merely an object that is owned then this might be seen as reasonable behaviour. It is not reasonable behaviour, not now, not then. Worse, in my opinion is that Abraham went along with this idea. I think it not unreasonable to consider that obedience to her mistress aside, Hagar was probably an unwilling participant in this whole affair. Put simply, she was raped. Oh, you say, but Abraham was the amazing father of the Israelite race. If he had sex with her without her freely given consent, and as a slave she could not do that, then he raped her.

Then Sarah had her own son and in a fit of jealous rage insisted that her, how shall we call him? stepson perhaps, and his mother, be banished from the camp. This done with the vindictive expectation that in being left to fend for themselves in the wilderness they would die and no longer be a problem for her. These days we would call it attempted murder.

Of course, Abraham, being the fine, upstanding man that he was, agreed to this course of action. Giving Hagar a jug of water he sent the two of them into the desert knowing that it was a virtual death sentence yet doing nothing further to provide for his son and his son's mother.

As we know, Abraham then justifies his actions by telling everyone God said it would be OK. Really? Your unconscionable behaviour is justified by saying it's OK with God?

I don't know about you, but by the time I get to this point in the story, and I would argue it actually gets worse before it gets better, I am fair steaming with anger at the whole thing. None of this behaviour is justified by God saying that it's OK and Ishmael will be the father of a nation. And, might I say, shame on us if we attempt to justify how the people in this story have acted because they are famous.

Now having torn the story into pieces I want to suggest that we can learn from the excruciatingly bad behaviour exhibited here. It's mostly a case of learning what not to do and so we will make the most of our opportunity at this point. You will likely have noticed that our theme today is, Creating is Responsibility. There is the taking of responsibility – yes, I have done this and I take responsibility for what I have done. And there is having responsibility – I am responsible for what needs to be done of the sort a parent has for their child or a captain for their team. We could call it responsibility for the past and responsibility for the present and future. Neither Abraham nor Sarah exhibited any kind of responsibility in this little saga. Neither of them took or showed responsibility for the dilemma they faced in Hagar and Ishmael. They made truly horrible choices that had led to this situation. Then, rather than admit those choices they proceeded to essentially cover up the crime by getting rid of the evidence.

I'm not going to focus any more on the gravity of the crime. I want instead to dig a little into how important it is to own our actions, and in particular I am going to lean into our topic from last week of the Other. It is often said that God doesn't have a scale of sin. It was only a white lie...no, it was a lie. I only stole a paperclip. No, you stole. I'm not talking about inhumane rules like the 3-strikes laws that sometimes come our way. This is about seeing ourselves as God sees us – broken and in need of Jesus in our lives. We are not cast off and left to rot, we are loved and held as God waits for us to turn toward him. The problem isn't in how God sees us. It is in how we see each other. When we see an Other coming toward us, what do we think? What do we do? Sarah

looked at Ishmael playing with Isaac and she saw an Other. That Ishmael was an Other of her making mattered not at all. And this, I suggest is where we so frequently struggle. We see an Other and our instinctive response is to get rid of them. That may be simply by ignoring them like we might ignore a beggar on the street. It might be by speaking poorly of them as we might do of someone of a different ethnicity to our own. Let's be blunt here – racism at work. It might be by actively working to prevent people we don't like moving into our street. Or voting for the party most likely to come down hard on crime because it's never MY people doing the crime. As we conveniently forget the enormous damage done by white collar crime and theft by banks and the like. In Sarah and Abraham we are given a reminder that this kind of behaviour toward the Other is evil at work. We don't need the devil in the mix to achieve evil, we are quite competent at creating it on our own.

I think it is Alcoholics Anonymous who say that the first step to recovery is owning that you have a problem. I want to say today that we have a problem. It's not alcohol. It's not drugs or gambling or domestic violence. It is in failing to welcome the Other and to show them the love and respect that Jesus would show. We all do it in one way or another, to a group of people or to individuals. It's time to turn that around. To learn from Abraham and Sarah and do better. What do you think?

## Days of Elijah

*Robin Mark*

These are the days of Elijah,  
Declaring the word of the Lord:  
And these are the days of Your servant Moses,  
Righteousness being restored.  
And though these are days of great trial,  
Of famine and darkness and sword,  
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying  
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'

Behold He comes, riding on the clouds  
Shining like the sun, at the trumpet call!  
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee  
And out of Zion's hill salvation comes!

These are the days of Ezekiel,  
The dry bones becoming as flesh.  
And these are the days of Your servant David,  
Rebuilding a temple of praise.  
These are the days of the harvest,  
The fields are as white in Your world!  
And we are the labourers in Your vineyard,  
Declaring the word of the Lord!

### Reading Luke 8:42b-48

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. <sup>43</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. <sup>44</sup> She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. <sup>45</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." <sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." <sup>47</sup> When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. <sup>48</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

### Reflection

Have you noticed how those on the edges of society are frequently wrestling with health issues. Sometimes it is physical health, often it is mental health. More often than not we don't notice these Others at all because for the most part they are hidden from our view. Of course, there are the occasional readily identifiable examples, the town drunk or bag lady or similar. Those people we point out and laugh about and give demeaning names. But mostly they are hidden behind closed doors, slowly decomposing into their base elements while the rest of the world passes them by without a thought. Woe betide one who decides to stand up for themselves and be seen. 'Take responsibility for yourself,' we say. Do this, don't do that, fix your problem, don't lean on society for your solutions. Lose weight, stop drinking, get off drugs, get a job. But do not, under any circumstances, expect me to invest in helping you. I am not and will not be held responsible for your condition.

The woman who had been suffering from bleeding for twelve years was just such an Other. In fact, if she had followed her society's rules and expectations

she would never have been in the crowd in the first place. The Jewish rules around women and bleeding insisted that she isolate herself while in that condition. She had no money left to ease the passage of time and so she lived on the fringe, likely existing on the limited food and support given to the excluded – something akin to our welfare benefit system. She had become Other in every sense of the word.

Sensing an opportunity to ease her condition she worked her way into a position to touch Jesus' clothes. We can be fairly sure she was disguised, possibly even as a man, in order to get close. And then the moment of truth. Would her touch make any difference to her condition, to anything? She moves carefully, using the movement of the crowd to mask her progress. She reaches out, a touch, barely anything in the bustle of all that is going on around her. Instantly she feels a shift in herself. Something has happened. Quickly she moves back a little, attempting to melt into the crowd so she can escape unseen.

But then Jesus stops and asks, 'Who touched me.' Terror! She is going to be caught and then she will be punished. Her final condition may be worse than the past. Hope! That's crazy, Jesus. Look at all the people trying to get a bit of you. Of course people touched you. Dozens of them. Then again. 'Someone touched me.' Dread! There is no more hiding. She will be found out. Has been found out, they just don't know who, yet. Perhaps in confessing they may show some mercy. Perhaps they won't stone her. It was me and I have been healed. Astonishment! There is no condemnation. Only love, and a blessing. She is still Other to all these crowds of people. But to Jesus she is family. No longer Other, welcomed, loved, accepted.

What a stark contrast between Sarah and Abraham, and Jesus. Condemnation of the Other or welcoming of the Other. We will regularly find ourselves in situations where we can choose to condemn or to welcome the Other. No matter how good we think we are at being inclusive we will always find some people more difficult to accept than others. I suspect that is one of a myriad of reasons we are challenged to not give up meeting together. We need the encouragement and support of others to be welcoming even when our instinct is to turn away.

Here is what I would like to suggest we do with this. Let's take this idea of welcoming the Other, with the goal of them no longer being Other, and think about how we can do that. I'm not talking here about evangelising or converting or any of that other stuff that fills us with fear and dismay. I think

that is best left for the Holy Spirit to worry about. No, I am talking about being welcoming and loving to those we might call Other. And remember, what makes your Other is likely different to what makes mine. I know what I need to work on. How about you? Let's not do this alone either. Let's actively search for ways to encourage and strengthen each other in the process. Let's aim to reduce the population of Other, one at a time.

### We Pray

God who receives every person in love, no matter who they are or how they are. Who supports, encourages, teaches and disciplines. Who welcomed us while we were still Other. Teach us to follow the example Jesus set for us. Teach us to look beyond our prejudices to see the loved person behind them. Strengthen us to be disciplined in how we serve and honour every person you love, choosing for their best even when our natural instinct is to turn away. Help us to be a community of people who are recognised for our love, not simply for ourselves but for everyone we encounter. Through Jesus who welcomed the Other, we pray. Amen.

### Indescribable

*Laura Story*

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea  
Creation's revealing Your majesty  
From the colours of fall to the fragrance of spring  
Every creature unique in the song that it sings  
All exclaiming

Indescribable, uncontainable,  
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.  
You are amazing God  
All powerful, untameable,  
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim  
You are amazing God

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go  
Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow  
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light  
Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night  
None can fathom



Indescribable, uncontainable,  
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.  
You are amazing God  
Incomparable, unchangeable  
You see the depths of my heart and You love me the same  
You are amazing God  
You are amazing God

## Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

Generous, giving God: the gifts we present this day are supposed to represent the best of our discipleship. Why then do we hide what we give, and why do we worry about who might know? Grant us the boldness we need to be Christ's disciples, living sacrifices choosing to welcome others with love and mercy. May we speak to those we know and even to strangers of the love of Jesus without fear. May the way we live our lives be an invitation to every person to follow Christ! In His holy name, we pray. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/41Sun12.htm>

Compassionate God, prayerfully we tune our hearts and minds to the needs of other people, and we pray that our small yet sincere compassion may unite with your immense love and bring blessing to those for whom we pray.

**Deal gently with the timid and the anxious, those who jump at their own shadow, and those whose phobias make it a major project to go down the street or visit a neighbour.**

Deal patiently with the foolish who have placed themselves in sordid situations from which it is hard to break free, and with the slow learners who repeat old mistakes.

**Deal confrontingly with the excuse makers who won't face up to their mistakes, and with the evasive ones who won't accept their responsibilities.**

Deal forcefully with the arrogant who trample over the well being of others, and with the rich and powerful that buy and bully their way past the rights of others.

**Deal mercifully with victims of the callous, the neglectful, and the cruel, and especially with the many who today feel exhausted, physically, or emotionally or spiritually.**

Deal comfortingly with the sick, the dying and the bereaved, and especially with those who have no knowledge of you, or are afraid of you rather than trusting your love.

**Deal bluntly or gently with your churches according to their respective needs, and especially give your love to any who are suffering harassment, ridicule or persecution.**

God of unspeakable love, if you can use us to answer any of these prayers, or the prayers of our fellow Christians around the world, please take us, guide us, and employ us, to the glory of your name.

All these things we pray through Jesus, our Lord, who taught us to pray...

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, holy be your name

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

### My hope is built

*Edward Mole*

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame

But wholly lean on Jesus' name

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand

All other ground is sinking sand

All other ground is sinking sand

When darkness veils His lovely face

I rest on His unchanging grace

In every high and stormy gale

My anchor holds within the veil

His oath, His covenant, His blood

Support me in the whelming flood

When all around my soul gives way

He then is all my hope and stay

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh, may I then in Him be found  
In Him, my righteousness, alone  
Faultless to stand before the throne

### Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we seek to serve, love and welcome the Other, in the name of our Lord Jesus...

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God,  
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

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