

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Too Hard

09 July 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

E Te Atua

E te Atua aroha mai O God love us
Ake ake tonu e *forever and ever*

E te Atua manaaki mai O God bless us

E te Atua awhina mai O God help us

O Worship the King

O worship the King all glorious above,
and gratefully sing his power and his love:
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

O tell of his might and sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast, by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
whom angels delight to hymn thee above!
Your humble creation, with glory ablaze,
in true adoration shall sing to your praise!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Based on a prayer by Bruce Prewer

We see the beauty of the land we live in
The bush and the gardens, the rivers and the sea
The sun and the moon and all the stars laid out
 But you, God of creation, are infinitely more beautiful

We see beauty in the smile of a friend
In the delighted murmurings of a tiny baby
The laughter of those we love
 But you, God of perfect joy, are infinitely more beautiful

We hear beauty in the song of the tui
The richness of a Maori waiata
The harmonies of instruments playing together
 But you, God of angelic choirs, are infinitely more beautiful

We find beauty in the listening ear of a friend
The care of a counsellor
The quiet conversation over coffee
 But you, God, our spirit friend, are infinitely more beautiful

We confess that too often we spend our energies on things that don't matter
We invest in second best
We resent anything that doesn't reward us immediately
And worry about issues we cannot change
Forgive us for sins of doing and of not doing
Help us to look to Christ for our purpose and strength
We bring our private confessions to God...

As we accept the invitation of Christ, release from our shoulders the burden of shame that is beyond our power to remit.

Restore our dishevelled spirits, and strengthen our faith in your abundant love. Return to us an awareness of the beauty of your ways, and enable us to walk in that beauty without looking back.

Through Christ Jesus our Redeemer. Amen

The Peace

Notices

Reading 1 Kings 19:9-13

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

¹¹ He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Reflection

I have a confession to make. I hate playing games I have no chance of winning. If the only option is losing then I'm just not interested, thank you very much. It's OK if I have a reasonable chance of improving to the point of the occasional win, but if I'm never going to win then I won't bother starting. Some people would call bad tempered or maybe say I'm a sore loser. That's OK by me. The truth is that if I stand no chance of winning, then it's just not fun, and I would rather spend my time doing something else. For me the key point is in the idea or the possibility that with sufficient effort I might have a chance of the win. And please, don't give me that PC rubbish that it's not about winning, it's all about having fun. If I don't have at least a vague chance of winning then I'm never going to have any fun.

I don't think I'm extreme either. I suspect that a large proportion of the population, not all, but many, feel similarly. We want to win in some way or

another. And when it gets too hard to win our enthusiasm falters, wanes and finally goes away altogether. Think about it this way. When the All Blacks lose the World Cup the entire nation goes into mourning. That's not because it's all about playing the game, it's because we didn't win. On the other hand, how many people listening this morning can tell me anything at all about the New Zealand National Lacrosse team. Likely few to no-one, because they don't win anything. (Not entirely true, but it's hardly world-shattering stuff)

All of which brings me to Elijah. Elijah was an amazing man. He was courageous, he was creative, he was insightful. He healed people, he raised people from the dead, he spoke truth into darkness and he fought against the depravity of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel. Our story this morning comes after he has seen an incredible miracle and annihilated 400 prophets of Baal. This guy is the Terminator of 900BC. And it is not enough. Jezebel has sworn to kill him and he is left, on his own, wondering, 'What is the point?' What is the point of doing all this incredible stuff when he just ends up running for his life? What is the point in standing up for God when it seems like the whole world is bent on destroying him? It's just too hard. It's no wonder he has this, 'Woe is me,' moment. To be honest, I think I would have felt exactly the same way.

All of which makes me wonder about what it means to be faithful to God when everything goes pear shaped. Every person I know has moments, sometimes greatly extended moments, where they find themselves asking if this Christianity thing is just too hard. There's all this stuff going on around us. People who are sick. People dying. People hurting. We are struggling with our relationships, with our jobs, with our finances. There are people who annoy us, people who make us sad, people who get us angry. And somehow we are supposed to rise above it all and live like the saints – shining lights displaying the glory of God when all we want to do is find a cave and hide. Give up, even. Please let me know if you have never felt like that. I would like to sit at your feet and learn, because it often feels all too hard to me. Like Elijah I just want to hide in that cave and be left alone to wallow in my misery. 'I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

I like how God intervenes to pull Elijah out of his funk. He doesn't berate him for his behaviour or come up with ways he is being an idiot or selfish. God asks a simple question: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Then he waits for Elijah to finish his rant. Then, rather than turning up in a whirlwind or an earthquake or a fire, all displays of power, God speaks out of the sound of sheer silence. 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Likely a soft, barely audible whisper. With

those six words God takes Elijah's focus from all that is too hard and places it where it is best – on God. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Because in that space between heaven and earth we discover a new perspective. We find a new way of looking at the world. Somehow the too hard becomes manageable because we no longer face it alone.

The God Who Stays

Matthew West

If I were You

I would've given up on me by now
I would've labelled me a lost cause
'Cause I feel just like a lost cause

If I were You

I would've turned around and walked away
I would've labelled me beyond repair
'Cause I feel like I'm beyond repair

Oh but somehow

You don't see me like I do
Somehow You're still here

You're the God who stays
You're the God who stays
You're the One who runs in my direction
When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands
With wide open arms
And You tell me nothing I have ever done
Can separate my heart from the God who stays

I used to hide

Every time I thought I let You down
I always thought I had to earn my way
But I'm learning You don't work that way

My shame can't separate

My guilt can't separate

My past can't separate

I'm Yours forever

My sin can't separate
My scars can't separate
My failures can't separate
I'm Yours forever

No enemy can separate
No power of hell can take away
Your love for me will never change
I'm Yours forever

Reading Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Reflection

Jesus, of all people, knows just how hard it is. There are several examples from the Gospels we could use but I want to zero in on one in particular. Let's pause and consider the moment on the cross Jesus calls out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. Consider that here is a man whose entire life has been spent with the sole purpose of connecting other people with God. Every word he has spoken, every action he has taken has been designed to bring hope to the lost, freedom to the prisoner, healing to the sick. All so that every person could have a personal relationship with God. And now that very God has abandoned him in his moment of greatest distress and need. Sit with that. Allow the hurt and anguish and sorrow to sink in. Don't try to justify it based on what you know now, don't try to make it out to be OK because everything turned out alright. Sit with Jesus' sense of abandonment and loss. Let it seep into your bones. Feel it.

Jesus wasn't hanging there on the cross thinking to himself, this is OK, it's all going to work out. He was in agony – of body, of mind, of spirit. When he cried

out to God there was no play acting going on. It was real. As Christians we tend to have these fantasy-filled ideas of how Jesus was always in control, always fully aware and connected with God. I want to challenge that perspective. The creeds we sometimes say tell us that Jesus was fully human. To be fully human means just that. He didn't and couldn't know everything that was going on in the way God does. He had a fully human capacity to live and move and have a relationship with God in exactly the same way you or I do. I suspect his prayer life was likely more connected to God than most of ours, certainly than mine, but it was still just that, a prayer life. He didn't have a supernatural ability to snap his fingers and have the world change around him. He did have a human ability to minister to people aided by the Holy Spirit, exactly the same way we have the ability to minister to people with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The reason I am going into this is that I want us to understand that Jesus struggled with life and death and much of what goes on in between in the same way we do. Otherwise, how could he identify with our struggles and needs? How could he understand what it is like when we find life is simply too hard?

All this means that when Jesus says the words, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,' we can have confidence because he has been there. Our weariness, our burdens are one with his own. Our exhaustion and the experience of it being too hard, of crying out to God, 'Where are you?' are similar to that of Jesus. So when, like Elijah we struggle and find ourselves saying, 'I alone am left,' Jesus answers, 'I get it, I know just how it feels.' He doesn't try to tell us that God has it all in control and we don't have to worry. Instead, he dwells with us in our pain and struggle and offers us rest. As often as not the burdens aren't going away. Jezebel continued to hunt Elijah for as long as she was alive. More often than we like to admit the heavy burdens will be a life-long weight we have to bear. And Jesus makes no promise to remove the burden, only a promise to give us rest.

I began with the premise that Creating is too hard. I think that left to our own devices and drawing on our own strength creating really is too hard. We can have moments, sometimes even years when we are on top and everything is fine. Always there will come a point where the effort is too much, the burden too heavy and we can no longer manage in our own strength. Even then, the fortunate among us can turn to family and friends for an extra dose of encouragement and support. That can frequently keep us going for longer. Eventually, sooner for some, longer for others, we will run out. Everything we

have invested in life will no longer be sufficient. I ache for those who come to this point and can go no further, who have nothing left to lean on and who in one way or another find themselves collapsing inward. I long for them to hear the gentle whisper out of the silence, 'Come to me and rest.' No judgement, no expectation, no payment required. 'Pause with me and rest. I know it's too hard. I've been there. Your too hard is different to my too hard and it's still too hard, so rest with me.' There is no whirlwind or earthquake. Simply the gentle whisper of invitation. I wonder if you and I can learn to offer that rest to the Other who is finding life is too hard? What do you think?

We Pray

Gentle God, creator of hope, of peace, of rest. We each carry our burdens and sometimes those burdens become too much, too hard. Teach us to hear your whispered invitation of rest. Gift us grace to dwell in your presence, not to achieve or compete or succeed, but to be. To be still and know you are God. And as we do, to reach out to the Other with the same invitation. Not to change or convert but to dwell with them in their space and offer them the same rest you offer us. Through Jesus, who experienced the too hard and knows our burdens, we pray. Amen.

How Great is Our God

Chris Tomlin

The splendour of a king, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice
He wraps Himself in light and darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice

How great is our God
Sing with me how great is our God
And all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands and time is in His hands
Beginning and the end, beginning and the end
The Godhead Three in One, Father, Spirit and Son
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names, worthy of all praise
My heart will sing how great is our God

Offering

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

God of compassion and mercy, you claim each one of us as your children. Like a parent, you are joyful when we find joy and your heart aches when we fall, fail, or feel less than the beloved heirs to the kingdom you meant us to be. The yoke the Bible describes doesn't burden us but reminds us that you yearn for us to be a church, a community, that supports, steadies, and sustains when life makes us weary. The gifts we give this day we give in gratitude for this yoke that helps us finish the race in faithfulness. Bless our giving and its use, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Jean Kissel

Loving God, we thank you for the ministry of this church. We think of the connections we have with our community, for the Tongan Church and the Filipino Church who worship in our facilities. For all the community groups who use our spaces. For the smaller groups who gather for their various activities. For our online community gathering to worship each week.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you have done among us.

We thank you for the gift we have been to one another. We remember the Sunday school teachers, mentors, and pastors who shaped us and formed us in Christian love. We recall the saints who have gone before yet whose care and influence are still so present.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you have done among us.

We thank you for your provision that never runs out. We attend to your call out of scarcity and into abundance as well as your assurance that we can depend on you, the God who provides. We notice that our community has so much need, and we trust that you will provide the way for us to meet those needs when we follow your voice.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you are doing among us.

We thank you for the gifts you are nurturing among us now. We notice the Spirit at work among your people, bringing forth gifts of compassion, justice, cooking, caring for children, really excellent hugs, and kind, encouraging words. We are learning to celebrate the gifts we have rather than despair of the gifts we think we ought to have.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you are doing among us.

We thank you for the dreams you give us, dreams of a new reality where all people can thrive as a community brought together in love. We welcome your

invitation to imagine how God-given abundance could transform our neighbourhood. Your dream is good and beautiful, even when it feels daunting.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you will do among us.

We thank you for the ways you guide us into new expressions of your love in the world. We grieve for the ideas and ministries that gave life in the past that we now set aside to make room for new imaginings to take root. We rejoice that you continue to journey with us as we imagine a new reality into being, because nothing is impossible with God.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all you will do among us.

Communion

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you

This is the table of the Lord.

He invites all who love him to come and share in this joyful feast.

O Come to the Altar

Steven Furtick

Are you hurting and broken within

Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin

Jesus is calling

Have you come to the end of yourself

Do you thirst for a drink from the well

Jesus is calling

O come to the altar

The Father's arms are open wide

Forgiveness was bought with

The precious blood of Jesus Christ

Leave behind your regrets and mistakes

Come today there's no reason to wait

Jesus is calling

Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy

From the ashes a new life is born

Jesus is calling

Oh what a Saviour
Isn't He wonderful
Sing alleluia, Christ is risen
Bow down before Him
For He is Lord of all
Sing alleluia, Christ is risen

Bear your cross as you wait for the crown
Tell the world of the treasure you've found

Communion cont.

We are here because Jesus has invited us.
When Jesus was on earth he often enjoyed meals with his friends.
On the night before he died, when darkness was beginning to fall, he sat at table with the disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem.
At this Last Supper, he broke bread and took wine, and told his disciples to remember him by following his example.
Today, we are his disciples and we are glad to do what he has told us.

As the Lord Jesus took bread and wine, I take this bread and wine to be set apart for this holy use. And as he gave thanks, let us give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, you made this world marvellous for us to enjoy.
You gave Jesus to be our friend and to bring us to you.
You send you Spirit, to make us one family in Christ.
For these gifts of your love we thank you, and join with angels and saints in this joyful hymn of praise.

Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory
Hosanna in the Highest
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

For your kindness to us and your goodness to all

We give you thanks

For showing us your love by sending your Son, who gave his life for us, and rose again from death, and lives to pray for us forever

We give you thanks

For Jesus taking away all that separates us from you, and making us friends with you and with one another

We give you thanks

For Jesus bringing us together at this table to strengthen us by his love

We give you thanks

Send your Holy Spirit on us and these your gifts of bread and juice, that we may know Christ's presence, real and true, and be his faithful followers, showing your love for the world.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, forever. Amen.

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

Te Karakia O Te Atua

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi

Kia tapu tou Ingoa

Kia tae mai tou rangatira-tanga.

Kia meatia tau e pai ai

ki runga i te whenua,

kia rite ano ki to te rangi.

Homai ki a mātou aianei

he taro mā mātou mo tēnei ra.

Murua o mātou hara

Me mātou hoki e muru nei

i o te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.

Aua hoki mātou e kawea kia whaka-waia;

Engari whaka-orangia mātou, i te kino:

Nou hoki te rangatira-tanga,

te kaha,

me te kororia,

Ake, ake, ake.

Āmine.

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done

On earth

As it is in heaven

Give us

This day our daily bread

And forgive us our sins

As we forgive those

Who sin against us

And lead us not into temptation

Deliver us from evil

For yours is the kingdom

The power

And the glory

Forever and ever

Amen

Communion cont.

On the night of his arrest the Lord Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

In the same way he took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Drink from it, all of you.'

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are they who find refuge in him.

Shine, Jesus, Shine

Graham Kendrick

Lord, the light of Your love is shining

In the midst of the darkness, shining

Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us

Set us free by the truth You now bring us, Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory

Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence

From the shadows into Your radiance

By the blood, I may enter Your brightness

Search me, try me, consume all my darkness, Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on your kingly brightness

So our faces display your likeness

Ever changing from glory to glory

Mirrored here may our lives tell your story, Shine on me, shine on me

Benediction and Grace

As we go may we find the rest Jesus offers when it is too hard, and when it is easy...

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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