

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Binary

16 July 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 119

By your words I can see where I'm going;
they throw a beam of light on my dark path.

**I've committed myself and I'll never turn back
from living by your righteous order.**

Everything's falling apart on me, GOD;
put me together again with your Word.

**Festoon me with your finest sayings, GOD;
teach me your holy rules.**

My life is as close as my own hands,
but I don't forget what you have revealed.

**The wicked do their best to throw me off track,
but I don't swerve an inch from your course.**

I inherited your book on living; it's mine forever—
what a gift! And how happy it makes me!

**I concentrate on doing exactly what you say—
I always have and always will.**

Thy Word

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Most of our lives are ordinary, God
Every day is much the same as the day before
We eat the same food
We go to the same places
We meet the same people
We do the same jobs

For some of us
That is exactly how we like it
Others bemoan the sameness

Through all of it you are there
Blessing our food as we eat it
Travelling our paths as we journey

Engaged in our conversations

Labouring alongside us

Mostly we don't notice

Your presence

Quiet, still, waiting

Waiting for us to see you

Waiting for us to hear you

Waiting

You long to be a part of our lives

Our ordinary lives

Seen, heard, enjoyed

Gift us eyes to see and ears to hear Your presence

We bring our private confessions to you now

May we be filled with the joy of knowing God's presence in our lives

Forgiveness, hope and peace

Flowing down upon us

Through Christ our Saviour. Amen.

The Peace

Notices

He Kororia

Reading

Romans 8:1-8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Reflection

I am going to begin by saying that Creating is not Binary, even though that is my title. But first, let's begin by exploring the meaning of binary a little. There are likely some listening who are expecting me to launch into detailed explanation of Math and computer science and we are not going there. Instead, I want you to imagine two cakes. One is chocolate and one is carrot. They have both just come out of the oven and are sitting there, waiting to be eaten. There is only one rule about eating these cakes. If you eat one, you can't eat the other. I have presented you with a choice in these cakes. One, or the other, not both. This is the essence of binary. Two items from which you can make a choice. It could be two rugby teams and you can only cheer for one team. It could be two pairs of socks and you can only wear one pair. We, that is you and I, are very good at reducing life to binary choices. Either/Or. We do that because the alternative becomes exponentially more difficult. A third cake makes things harder and a fourth or fifth, let's just not go there.

This kind of choosing happens in life all the time, most often without our even being aware of it. It is simply a way our brains have developed to help us navigate through the world. If we considered every possible option every possible time we would be paralysed by indecision as the process of thinking about and understanding all the consequences of each choice in relation to all the others brings us to a dead stop. And so we don't consider all the options. We narrow things down, mostly to two choices, and tell ourselves we have considered every possibility and can now pick the best option.

The reality is that we have not come close to considering every possibility because it is simply too hard. Take these two examples from the world of engineering. For the uninitiated we are looking at how the back wheel of a motorcycle is connected to the rest of the motorcycle. It's called the swingarm. The first image is a reasonably standard design that for many years has for the most part been considered the best option. The second image has been designed by a computer that is able to consider many more options than a regular engineer could ever take into account. It is lighter, stronger, and more effective than the standard design.

So, how about faith? Do we do the same, dare I say, 'dumbing down,' of our options when it comes to faith? Of course we do. We have no more ability to consider all the options of faith than we do for anything else in life. We simplify, often to the point of grotesqueness, everything we believe. We make it binary because then we can deal with choosing. Paul does it in our reading

when he writes about the flesh versus the Spirit as if there is nothing at all in between. The truth is, we like to hear it that way because it is easy to understand. I'm in or I'm out, I'm saved or I'm not, I'm a Christian or I'm not. Easy. Flesh is all the icky stuff, and Spirit is all the nice stuff. Flesh is all the stuff I enjoy, and Spirit is all the stuff I endure. Oh dear, I didn't say that did I? Binary, all the way, baby!

Thing is, life tells us it's not that way at all. Even when we know we are dumbing down our choices we also know there are options and choices we are avoiding in the process. The question this leaves us with is how we manage all the possibilities without ending up either paralysed and unable to move on one end or with a dumb faith that can't think for itself. I'm hoping you're with me when I say I don't like that binary option.

I think the first step is to refine what Paul means when he talks about the flesh and the Spirit. It's important to understand here that he is not using these terms to refer to sex and drugs and rock and roll on the one hand and a life devoted to prayer and self-denial on the other. He is rather speaking to something far deeper for us humans. How we see ourselves in the world. In particular, how we see ourselves in relation to each other and to God. When Paul talks about living according to the flesh he is challenging our naturally, "self-centred and selfish way of being human."¹ I suspect that most of the decisions we make in life come down to some form of, 'What's in it for me.' It could be argued there is nothing innately wrong with that. After all, survival dictates looking after ourselves. The problem comes when we move from caring for ourselves to failing to care for the Other. When we fail to consider how our choices and actions can affect those around us. This is where our binary thinking fails us because it reduces the equation to, 'It's us or them.' In Paul's understanding living by the Spirit is almost the opposite to this. It invites us to build a way of life that looks toward God and toward the Other as good and essential parts of our life equation. It is the invitation to love one another as Christ has loved us. It is the invitation to cross the road to the injured person lying on the ground and care for them even if it comes at a personal cost. It is the invitation to connect with God with every fibre of our being, not because we must, but because everything about who and how we are gravitates toward it.

An article I read in preparation talked about striving toward this goal. Perhaps it is not a matter of striving so much as it is allowing our thinking to grow

¹ <https://michaelpahl.com/2019/04/08/the-flesh/>

beyond ourselves, to include God and to include the Other as part of choosing in life. Learning to love beyond ourselves. Learning to love ourselves. Food for thought...

Open the eyes of my heart

Paul Baloche

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord

Open the eyes of my heart

I want to see You

I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up

Shining in the light of Your glory

Pour out Your power and love

As we sing holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy

We cry holy, holy, holy

You are holy, holy, holy

I want to see you

Reading

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among

thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Reflection

Everyone wants to be the good soil. Best case scenario I'm the hundredfold soil. Yes, fist-pump, high-five, victory dance. Sixty is OK. Thirty, meh, it'll do. But what if it turns out I'm not good enough? What if I only ever manage a measly 1 or 2, or worse, nothing at all. What if I'm useless? I'm not smart. I can't play an instrument. Even the idea of speaking in front of people makes me spasm. Nothing I can do is any use to anyone. Maybe that means I'm the rocky ground or the thorny ground. That would make me worse than useless, more than a failure. Perhaps it's better to not even try, after all, nothing ventured, nothing lost, right?

Let's begin with a little thought experiment. Imagine you are planting seeds in your garden. Maybe carrot seeds or lettuce seeds. When you plant those seeds, how many end up on the path or in the weeds? Can I answer that for you? Maybe one or two, but probably none. Now take it a little further. Imagine a farmer sowing a paddock. I don't even know how they do that these days, but let's suppose the paddock has been prepared, the soil turned and fertilised and it's ready for seeding. Now suppose the farmer for some crazy reason has to sow the field by hand and walks up and down scattering seed as they go. What proportion of the seed do you think they are going to throw on the unprepared edges and tractor paths? As little as humanly possible! Not none, but very little.

Have you ever noticed how much focus we place on the seed that falls on the path and among the thorns? Yet we give no attention to the fact that we place most of our emphasis on the tiny proportion that fall outside the boundaries. It's like the 80/20 principle only it's moved to 99.99/.01 principle with nearly our entire attention placed on a vanishingly small problem.

This, of course, is our binary problem coming back to haunt us. Black versus white, good versus bad, no shades or colours to be seen. So, rather than focus on the .01% of seed that falls by the way, let's turn our eyes to the 99.99 that bears fruit. And let's not worry about the hundred, sixty or thirty-fold than many of us will likely never achieve. Let's be realistic about what we might be able to achieve. Bear with me here. Suppose I plant a tomato seed and it grows

up and produces a single tomato. I would be disappointed, right? I would think to myself – all this care and attention to this plant and I only get one tomato. But for the price of a single seed, I have received a tomato. It may be less than I wanted, but it is still more than I began with. And sure, if I price in my effort and attention it makes for an expensive tomato. But it is still a tomato I grew in my garden and that has a value all its own. Given my distinct lack of a green thumb a single tomato is cause for celebration. And I'm darn sure that it tastes a whole lot better than anything I can buy at the supermarket.

So now we turn to the question of what this idea of a seed and a tomato and good soil might mean for you and me right now. I think the fact that you are listening to this right now is an indicator of the kind of soil you are. You are good soil.

As good soil you can, and do, bear fruit. It may not be the fruit you would like to yield. It may not be as much fruit as you would like to yield. It may not look as good or sound as good as you would like. But it is fruit and, like my tomato, is a cause to celebrate.

Sure, there are the people who seem to be able to grow huge tomatoes and in vast quantities and who freely share them around the neighbourhood. But let me let you in on a secret. What this person does and what that person does matters not one whit. What matters is what you do.

You will likely be familiar with the story of the widow's mite. Jesus observes rich people putting lots of money into the temple offering. Then along comes a widow who puts in a few cents. It seems nothing until we are told that it is all she has to live on, and she is giving it away. Jesus points out that her tiny gift is of far greater life value than the much larger monetary gifts given by those who could easily afford to give. I believe the fruit you bear as good soil is more like the widow's mite than it is the riches of the wealthy. To you it may seem tiny, insignificant, even worthless. In God's eyes it is a precious gift that not another person on the planet can give. You bring colour to an otherwise black and white, binary world by bearing the unique fruit only you can create. I'm inclined to think that's pretty special.

If pressed I would say that I think 99.99% of the population is good soil in their own way. They may not fit my definition of Christian, but I'm not convinced that matters as much as I used to think. I think what matters is whether they are doing their best, in their own way, to move away from thinking about the world as, 'us and them,' and learning to love each other as Christ loves them, even if they don't own the meaning of that love. I'm not saying being a Christian is not relevant. I am saying that maybe God loves and works through a lot more people than us Christians tend to acknowledge.

We Pray

God of colour and light, dark and shade, of success and failure, of me and my Other. Teach us to connect with you, to see ourselves as you see us, and more, to see the Other as you see them. Enable us to learn to appreciate the good soil that we are in your eyes. Enable us to learn to appreciate the good soil that is our Other. Let us see the fruit we bring into the world with your eyes and become conscious bearers of the precious gift of creation you have placed in each of us. Let us be and see colour where before we saw black and white, and celebrate the single tomato in the face of our hopes for more. Through Jesus, who invites us to see the beauty in the smallest offering we pray. Amen.

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

Offering

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

Creator God from whom all blessings grow: as we dedicate our tithes and offerings, we acknowledge that you have blessed us to be the fertile soil from which the good news of your kingdom will spring forth. Move us, we pray, beyond seeing our role as passive or powerless, depending totally on the quality of the seed and the expertise of the planter. Remind us that you are counting on us for fruitfulness, inviting the Other to share your love, grace, and power as we bear fruit that eases the suffering sick, feeds the hungry, brings justice to the oppressed and love and compassion to those who feel disconnected or forgotten. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Brenda

The needs of the world are too many and large for us. But not for God.
We pray.

For our nation.

Author of the universe, at night the sign of the Cross rises and sets over our land. Grant that the hour may come when the Man of the Cross will be welcomed into every heart, and into every street, office, school, court and parliament. May the love of Christ flourish and his values transform our land.

For the homeless.

God of the "Son of Man who had nowhere to lay his head," please be with all who will sleep outdoors tonight in the cold. Bless the efforts of those agencies

who try to help them. Please make us more determined to build a society and world where everyone who wants shelter can obtain it.

For the Tangatawhenua of Aotearoa.

We pray, Holy Friend, as we participate in the celebration of Matariki and give thanks for the tangatawhenua of this nation, that you will teach us to deal wisely and justly and compassionately with the Maori people of this land. We pray with deep yearning for that wonderful tomorrow when our pastors and theologians, our scientists, prime ministers, court judges, our teachers, guides and counsellors will be representative of all the people of Aotearoa and particularly for Maori who have been excluded through no fault of their own.

For those who suffer.

Immortal Love, rest your suffering children on pillows of Divine compassion, and with fingers of supreme tenderness dislodge the seeds of disease. In daylight hours encircle them with human kindness, and in the long night hours surround them with that holy warmth of your Spirit which nothing can deny.

For our own witness.

God of both our neighbours and our enemies, assist us to be a help, not a hindrance, to them. May our quiet faith steady the wavering, our sturdy hope encourage the faint-hearted, and our sincere compassion soften those who appear heartless. Through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Amen!

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

Te Karakia O Te Atua

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi	Our Father in heaven
Kia tapu tou Ingoa	Hallowed be your name
Kia tae mai tou rangatira-tanga.	Your kingdom come
Kia meatia tau e pai ai	Your will be done
ki runga i te whenua,	On earth
kia rite ano ki to te rangi.	As it is in heaven
Homai ki a mātou aianei	Give us
he taro mā mātou mo tēnei ra.	This day our daily bread
Murua o mātou hara	And forgive us our sins
Me mātou hoki e muru nei	As we forgive those
i o te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.	Who sin against us
Aua hoki mātou e kawea kia whaka-waia;	And lead us not into temptation
Engari whaka-orangia mātou, i te kino:	Deliver us from evil
Nou hoki te rangatira-tanga,	For yours is the kingdom
te kaha,	The power
me te kororia,	And the glory
Ake, ake, ake.	Forever and ever
Āmine.	Amen

Great is Thy faithfulness

Thomas Obediah Chisholm, William Marion Runyan

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we celebrate the single tomatoes as much or more than the massive crops...

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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