

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Continuity*

23 July 2023

### Call to Worship – Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

**You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.**

You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

**Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.**

You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

**test me and know my thoughts.**

See if there is any wicked way in me,

**and lead me in the way everlasting.**

### At the name of Jesus

*Caroline M. Noel*

At the name of Jesus  
ev'ry knee shall bow,  
ev'ry tongue confess him  
King of glory now;  
'tis the Father's pleasure  
we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning  
was the mighty Word.

At his voice creation  
sprang at once to sight,  
all the angel faces,  
all the hosts of light,  
cherubim in heaven,  
stars upon their way,

all the heav'nly orders  
in their great array.

In your hearts enthrone him;  
there let him subdue  
all that is not holy,  
all that is not true;  
crown him as your captain  
in temptation's hour;  
let his will enfold you  
in its light and pow'r.

Christians, this Lord Jesus  
shall return again  
in his Father's glory,  
with his angel train;  
for all wreaths of empire  
meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him  
King of glory now.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*Moira Laidlaw, Liturgies Online, <https://www.liturgiesonline.com.au/>*

Merciful God,

You plant each of us like seeds in the same field and together we are nourished and nurtured by the sun. We sway in the wind and are refreshed by the rain. We are blessed by the knowledge that you want us to grow towards what you call us to be.

When we deprive others of that same opportunity, **forgive us.**

When we want to uproot those whom we believe do not belong in our part of the field, **forgive us.**

When we label others as good or bad rather than accept them for who they are, **forgive us.**

When we are reluctant to acknowledge that we ourselves are a mixture of weeds and wheat, **forgive us.**

When we are afraid to look into the fields of our own lives to see what is growing there, **forgive us.**

O God, you know us inside and out, through and through.  
You search us out and lay your hand upon us.  
You know what we are going to say even before we speak.  
So we pray that you will help us to reach out to the uprooted and rejected,  
the lonely and the outcast, and to develop and grow the good in ourselves, in  
others, and in the world.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## The Peace

### Notices

#### Reading Genesis 28:10-19a

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. <sup>12</sup> And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; <sup>14</sup> and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. <sup>15</sup> Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." <sup>16</sup> Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" <sup>17</sup> And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

<sup>18</sup> So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. <sup>19</sup> He called that place Bethel;

## Reflection

Look around you. Look at the building, at the furnishings, at the decorations. For those of you at home, think about what has changed over the years. Perhaps the first house you lived in, or the first town you lived in. What has changed in that time? What things have happened that have made you feel good? What things have happened that break your heart? Think about the people who have passed through. Friends made and lost. Think about your early experiences of faith. The highs and lows of a growing faith. Those activities and encounters that kept you coming back for more. That keep you coming back for more.

Now, think about how it all is today. Slowing down, the sadness of friends and partners dying, the church emptying with few if any children. The remembered songs that are hardly sung, the stories of wonderful days in the past that are barely remembered. The questions of whether it has all been worth it. I know there is a deep-seated sorrow in our hearts for what seems to be lost.

Everything we have invested our lives into seems to be fading away, our efforts for nothing. There is a grief that we don't like to talk about that stalks our hearts and won't go away. A fear that if we look too closely we will see our mistakes compounding over the years and know that it has all been in vain.

I suspect that Jacob was feeling a lot of the same things. Think for a moment of the history of his story. He is called a cheat and usurper, and not without reason. He cheated his brother out of his birthright and stole the blessing Isaac had reserved for Esau. Esau hates Jacob and has resolved to kill him. Now he is on the run, away from the land promised to Abraham and back to Haran, the place Abraham had been told to leave. As he lies down to sleep all the mistakes and disappointments haunt him, reminding him of all his failures. There is likely a deep-seated sorrow in his heart for what seems to be lost. Then he dreams.

The first part of his dream is well known and displayed in artworks and stories down through the centuries. The image of Jacob's ladder has inspired all sorts of imaginings and ideas over the years. And I am not going to focus on that today. Instead I want to focus on two things in particular. The first is this, in verse 13, 'And the LORD stood beside him...' I think this little phrase, barely noticed, is by far the most important phrase in Jacob's entire life. Here is the cheat and usurper, running for his life, back toward where his grandfather had come from. And the Lord stood beside him. Take a moment to hold that in your mind. Roll it around for a bit. Examine it. You cheat, you failure, of course

God will abandon you. Look at all your mistakes and screwups, the hurt you have caused, the disappointments, the losses, the grief. You're on your own now.

And God does not abandon him. God does not leave him to stew in his own juices. God comes at what might have been his lowest point and stands beside him. The power of that simple act cannot be explained in words. It cannot be explained in images. It can only be experienced. It is, perhaps, one reason why none of the images I found of Jacob's ladder showed God standing beside Jacob. Who can give any hint to the power of that simple action? Perhaps we can express it through our own lives when someone has stood beside us in a moment of deep sorrow or disappointment. No words necessary, the simple fact of a kind presence enough to bring some level of comfort.

God brings to Jacob so much more than even this. The words, 'And the LORD stood beside him...' convey far more than a geographical instance. They show a depth of care, of involvement, of awareness, of love that acknowledges his situation and holds him when he is most alone.

The second thing I want to focus on is this: "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac..." God is telling Jacob that he stood beside Abraham and Isaac in just the same way. God is not a, 'now you see me, now you don't,' character who simply pops up at opportune moments. God is in this for the long-haul. And that matters. A lot! Jacob, in his deepest hole is being told that God is with him now, was with him in the past, and will be with him in the future. Yesterday, today, forever. Jacob's relationship with God is high and wide and deep and remains through everything Jacob can throw at it.

The same goes for you and for me. No matter the sorrow, the disappointment, the mistakes or the failures, God stands beside us in the midst of it all. You are held when you feel most alone. You can look back and discover God beside you. Look forward and know God will be beside you. Look around and know God is beside you. God stands beside us – not to fix the errors of our ways – but to hold us in them. We all know Jacob's dream was not the end of his troubles or his mistakes. He continued to do dumb stuff, likely for the rest of his life. No matter what, God stood beside him. Think about your dumb stuff. Some of it likely embarrasses you and you wonder why God would even look at you. And God stands beside you and says, I was here then, I'm here now and I will be here in the future. Because I am a God of continuity. When I created you, I was in it for the long-term, so here I am.

## You are my strength

*Hillsong Worship*

You are my strength  
Strength like no other  
Strength like no other  
Reaches to me

You are my hope  
Hope like no other  
Hope like no other  
Reaches to me

In the fullness of Your grace  
In the power of Your Name  
You lift me up  
You lift me up

Unfailing love  
Stronger than mountains  
Deeper than oceans  
Reaches to me

Your love O Lord  
Reaches to the heavens  
Your faithfulness  
Reaches to the sky

## Reading Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

<sup>24</sup> He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup> but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup> And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' <sup>28</sup> He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' <sup>29</sup> But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."  
<sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup> and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

## Reflection

There is an interesting foible we humans tend to have, of assuming that we are the centre of the universe. The church has been particularly good at this particular trait over the centuries. A lovely example of this is the way it treated Galileo Galilee when he suggested that the sun did not, in fact, revolve around the earth. 'How dare you suggest that we are not the centre of all God's creation!' So they locked him up for his efforts. Of course, this human-centric view of things is not confined to the church. President Trump is the most obvious example of a narcissistic world view, but we are surrounded by everyday people who consider their ideas and opinions and needs to be the only ones that matter. It can be seen in people who insist that the only kind of music that should be played is the music they like. Or those who insist that no-one should ever engage in behaviour they don't approve of. As a minister I am quite frequently on the receiving end of people trying to tell me what my job should look like. That's OK, I get that different people have different perspectives on life and how it is lived. I can accept their view as valid and move on.

Where I am going with this is the need we seem to carry deep within us to explain to the world why we are right and everyone else has to fit our perception of the world. We leap to explain that those among us who do, 'BAD things,' should be collected up and burned with fire. Well, maybe not quite that serious, but they need dealing to! Think about your instant reaction to the ram raids the media has been making so much of recently. What should be done about those Others? Or how about that mother who killed her daughters? Or the man who shook his baby to death? Terrible, ghastly things.

They must be dealt with harshly. What about gangs and white supremacists and gun wielding thugs? Deal with them harshly! How about Others in weird cults who force people to work without pay? Or Others who give underage people drugs and alcohol? Deal with them harshly!

There are likely some situations where a harsh sentence is justified. But unless you were on the jury and heard all the evidence then you have no right to make any judgement. Even then juries can only work with the information they are given and that is usually partial and not always reliable. The point I am trying to make here is that it is normal human behaviour to want to pass judgement on what is going on around us. We naturally lean into our own view as being valid and that of the Other as being invalid.

The problem is that we don't see what God sees. We don't know what God knows. Our information is most definitely partial and never entirely reliable. Yet, to listen to most people you would never know that to be the case. You could be forgiven for thinking that people in the church are omniscient in their ability to discern all things. Aha, you there, you are a sinner, and you can't possibly be in the kingdom of God. And you there, I can see you are definitely not a Christian because you smoke and dance and drink alcohol. Repent! Turn from your wicked ways! Say the sinner's prayer because that is how you get into the kingdom of God.

And God says...and God says, leave the weeds and the seeds. Because you don't know which is which. You don't know if this person is a weed or a good seed. Only I know which is which. So you stop your judging, stop making excuses for forcing people into your particular way of seeing the world, and look at me. Set your eyes of Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Why? Because then you won't be looking around attempting to judge anyone else. That is the job of the Son of Man and his reapers.

At which point you might be asking, how does this relate to Jacob? Do you remember what sort of man Jacob was? A cheat, a usurper, a failure on the run. Exactly the kind of person we don't want in the church, right!? And yet God came and stood beside him and told him, I was here yesterday, I am here today, I will be here tomorrow. How many stories in the Bible tell of terrible people who God stood beside as they slowly, and never completely, got their act together? Dare we judge Abraham, Jacob, Rahab, David, Mary Magdalene for their behaviour? If we dare, we must judge ourselves. And that will never end well.

Jesus tells us that the righteous will shine like the sun. That's not because they have miraculously managed to not sin. It is because God has given them new life. God has stood beside them, beside each of us, beside many we have no idea of, beside many we might be tempted to judge, beside many we do judge. God gives them and us a sense of the continuity of creation by telling us, 'I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And I am the God of Andrew and Catherine and Nan and Donald and 'insert your name here.' I am now, have always been, will always be beside you.

### We Pray

God of eternity, the beginning and the end, who stands beside us in all we do, whether we judge that to be good or bad. We confess that we too easily forget that you are so much more than we can ever hope to comprehend. We focus in on our own small needs and desires and push the Other to the edges, preferably out of sight. Help us to find you in all we do and to be satisfied with your presence, as sheep coming to drink from still water, filled with joy as you stand beside us. Gift us the wisdom to fix our eyes on the single point of certainty we have in Jesus. Through Jesus, who stands beside us in all we do. Amen.

### Only You

*Andy Park*

No one but You Lord  
Can satisfy this longing in my heart  
Nothing I do Lord  
Can take the place of drawing near to You

Only You can fill my deepest longing  
Only You can breathe in me new life  
Only You can fill my heart with laughter  
Only You can answer my heart's cry

Father I love You  
Come satisfy the longing in my heart  
Fill me overwhelm me  
Until I know Your love deep in my heart

## Offering

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

Holy God, we are living in days of division and polarization, and we regretfully confess that your church is not exempt from that statement. Regardless of where we stand, it is far too easy to look at those who see things differently and see them as weeds, stunting the good fruit we could bear. As we bring our offerings to you, the temptation to focus on our own agenda is strong. Help us to give generously without judging. Give us the faith to put our gifts to your use, and humility to know that only you can see clearly what is wheat and what is weed. We pray in the name of Christ who knows all hearts. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Frances Oakes

The young people who, subject to peer pressure, are at risk of taking drugs or submitting to sexual promiscuity.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The over-busy Christians who are in such a rush that they are in danger of losing touch with their core peace of their faith.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The very heavenly minded who are so caught up in their own religion that they hardly see Christ in a needy neighbour.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The leaders in business, politics and unions, who are ready to surrender their early ideals for personal gain or aggrandisement.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The weary person who, having risen above many previous setbacks, is now close to giving in to bitterness and despair.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The suffering people who feel that maybe their faith in God was wishful thinking and are about to retreat into bitterness.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

The folk in this congregation who are this day who might be wrestling with fears and temptations that threaten to overwhelm them.

Loving God, hear us.

**Jesus Christ, save your people.**

Most loving God, you are the companion of the lonely, strength of the weak, comfort of the sad, scourge of the apathetic, physician of the sick, rebuke of the self-righteous, friend of sinners, and the light of all those who must walk in darkness. Please give to your people the full blessing of your Holy Spirit, that we may keep the faith and practice the love, no matter the circumstances. 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

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

## Guide me O Thou great Redeemer

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand:  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
Feed me now and evermore, feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:  
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  
Be thou still my strength and shield,  
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee,

## Benediction and Grace

And as we go, may we be a people secure in the continuity of a God who  
stands beside us, yesterday, today and forever...

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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