

Creationist 2.0

Creating and Obstacles

13 August 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 105

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.

Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.

Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered.

Lord of all being, throned afar

Oliver Wendell Holmes

LORD of all being, throned afar,
Thy glory flames from sun and star;
Centre and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near.

Sun of our life, Thy quickening ray
Sheds on our path the glow of day;
Star of our hope, Thy softened light
Cheers the long watches of the night.

Our midnight is Thy smile withdrawn;
Our noontide is Thy gracious dawn;
Our rainbow arch, Thy mercy's sign;
All save the clouds of sin, are Thine.

Lord of all life, below, above,
Whose light is truth, whose warmth is love,
Before Thy ever-blazing throne
We ask no lustre of our own.

Grant us Thy truth to make us free,
And kindling hearts that burn for Thee,

Till all Thy living altars claim
One holy light, one heavenly flame.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

The heavens declare your glory

And the skies proclaim your handiwork

Morning sun and moon by night
The light and warmth that fuels our life
Casts shadows giving depth, insight
Joy mixed with surprise
The heavens declare your glory

And the skies proclaim your handiwork

Rolling hills and mountain peaks
Flowing streams and ocean deep
Each fashioned over time and space
Creation rests in your embrace
The heavens declare your glory

And the skies proclaim your handiwork

Thunder's roar and breeze's whisper
Creation sings to its Creator
You're not found in earthquake, fire or storm
But in the gentle silence...
The heavens declare your glory

And the skies proclaim your handiwork

We confess our slowness to see you at work around us. So focussed on the wood we cannot see the trees. The peace we find in our happy places your gift to us. The love we find in friends and family your gift to us. The joy we find in music, art and nature your gift to us. So often we take it all for granted, searching for miracles and large events as evidence of your mercy toward us. Teach us to find you in the silence, in the small things, in the everyday normal that fills our lives.

We bring our private confessions to you now...

May the God of all mercies cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image,
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Peace

Notices

Reading Genesis 37:1-4, 23-28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. ² This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Reflection

I've never been able to get up much fondness for Joseph. He was, to be fair set up for a fall by his father. However, he had a particular way of making everything worse than it needed to be. It's one thing to be favoured. It's a whole other thing to flaunt it. Consider this. Here we have a young man – 17 we're told – who is helping out his older brothers. Age and stage being what it was they were probably having a good time and more than likely not looking after the flock as well as they might. Young men with freedom to do their own thing...what do you expect, right? So, Joseph, the favoured one, comes home and tells tales. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to work out what likely came next. Brothers in trouble, Joseph the goody goody and relationship down the toilet although to be fair it was likely pretty far gone by then anyway.

Now Dad gets in on the act and has a special robe made for him, a robe clearly designed to set him apart as special – the favoured one. Showing how socially aware he is, Joseph wears the thing, likely everywhere. ‘Look at me, aren’t I special?’ This story was never going to end well.

Dad sends him on an errand to check in on his brothers, probably with the expectation that he will tell on them again. And he turns up wearing the robe. Makes you want to hit your head against the wall. Seriously, kid, what were you thinking?

I suspect that when his brothers grabbed him, took his robe and threw him in the hole they didn’t have a plan. It was most likely an act of supreme frustration at the entitled brat turning up to spoil their party yet again. That they ended up selling him to some passing slave traders on their way to Egypt likely has more to do with timing than anything else. Given the other option was to kill him I guess everyone felt they had profited from the exercise. Except Joseph, that is.

The benefit of hindsight tells us that this entire episode was simply a part of a much bigger story that led to Jacob’s family surviving through a severe famine. To leap to the end too quickly risks missing an important point. This family is selfish. Very, very selfish. All of them. From Jacob, across to his wives, down to his sons and we don’t even hear about the daughters. Everything in this story is about me, me, me. Even Jacob choosing one son over the other ten is an act of selfishness. Joseph is so focussed on himself he probably has a dozen mirrors in his room so he can gaze lovingly on himself wherever he is standing. And the ten other sons are so self-interested they convince themselves it is an act of kindness to sell Joseph into slavery in another country.

The wonder of this story is that God found anything good to make of these people. Which leads me to our first obstacle to creating. Ourselves. So much good is missed because we can’t get out of our own way. I want this. I want that. I want the next thing and the next. I suspect some might argue that this is a cultural thing and that other cultures are much more focused on including the other. That might be true. I also suspect that no matter the culture, selfishness is a problem. That issue to one side, selfishness is a barrier to creating because if we create only for ourselves we miss the richness and texture that only the other can bring. Food is a wonderful example. My dad was a meat, potato and three veg kind of guy. It wasn’t until much later in life that he began to discover the wonderful world of different cuisines and he

loved it. His world expanded and his thinking changed with it. I have discovered that when people find food from a different culture that they like they will often find out more about the country it came from and show more interest in what they are experiencing. It's not always the case, but pretty common. It is, in a way, allowing our selfishness to move us a little out of our selfishness.

This is simply a small example of how we can be completely focussed on ourselves to the point we miss out on what is happening around us. I am going to call it 'small world syndrome.' It might be we are focussed on our pain, or our family, or our work, or our garden, or our lack of mobility. Even something as broad as being focussed on travelling the world can become a 'small world' problem because we see nothing beyond it. And that is a problem. It is a problem because our view of the world becomes narrow and that means that what we can add to the world also becomes narrow. Our creativity diminishes with every step down the 'small world' path until there is nothing left but our desire to please ourselves in some way or another.

Truly an obstacle to being the people God has made us to be! I think we all suffer from 'small world syndrome' to some extent. But, if we can recognise the symptoms and actively learn to look beyond we can push it back, at least a little. In doing so we move closer to being the creators God has created us to be.

How do you suffer from 'small world syndrome'?

What can you do to widen your world?

[Blessed be your name](#)

Matt Redman

Blessed Be Your Name in the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow blessed be Your name
Blessed Be Your name when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be' blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering blessed be Your name

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name

Reading Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Reflection

I am only going to reflect on this reading briefly before I go into a bit of a thinking out-loud experiment. Apologies to those who will look at this online and come to church on Sunday thinking they are up with the play. It will likely be quite different. Thinking about our reading...

Mostly we focus on the fact that Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water. We want to be like Peter and do that miracle thing. Mostly we are like the other disciples, sat in the boat, terrified of everything we see and hear. It is in many ways a symptom of 'small world syndrome'. We are fearful of what we don't know or understand. When something or someone comes along and

they threaten our sense of normal fear kicks in. We want to protect what we have because what we have often defines who we are. Our self-image is closely linked to what we see, to the people we know and the things we are comfortable with. If any of those are challenged or we are moved out of our place of comfort our immediate response is to go into defensive mode. Keep the invaders at the gate! So the disciples huddled in the boat, afraid and crying out in fear. When we are afraid and in fear our sense of the world narrows and becomes pin-point focussed on what is in front of us. We lose the ability to bless and care for anyone beyond the immediate. We become less generous.

And here is where I am going to leave the script and ponder out loud. I have some notes, but I want to see where it takes us rather than tie it down. For those of you online I would love to see your comments down below. I really do want this to be a conversation rather than any kind of pontification on my part.

Thinking about pastoral care

What is pastoral care?

Why does it matter?

Why now?

What does it look like?

Love languages

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Physical touch
- Acts of service
- Receiving gifts

Generosity

Lack of fear

Wooing the other

Understanding ourselves as a pastoral community

Understanding who is our neighbour

Building a pattern of feeding the other

How do we become wooers and carers?

The act of giving as attractive

Māori concept of Manaakitanga

Mana

We Pray

Generous God, we rest for a moment in your presence.

We acknowledge that we are all, so one level or another, selfish. We draw into ourselves, allowing fear to make our world small and diminish our capacity to create. We become selfish and less generous, using our resources to put up barriers and walls to keep the other out, rather than giving all we have like the poor widow. Help us to find the courage to look beyond our small world and find the creativity to welcome the other with all we have to offer. Through Jesus, who gave himself, we pray. Amen.

Waymaker

Sinach

You are here, moving in our midst

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, working in this place

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, moving in our midst

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, working in this place

I worship You, I worship You

You are

Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper

Light in the darkness, my God

That is who You are

You are here, touching every heart

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, healing every heart

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, turning lives around

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, mending every heart

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, touching every life

I worship You, I worship You

You are here, meeting every need

I worship You, I worship You

That is who You are

Offering

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

Forgiving God, the first offering you ask for is the giving of ourselves, loving you and others boldly, refusing to let our fear of the storms around us keep us from taking risks. Forgive us for times when you have called us to leave our places of comfort, and we've ignored the call. Forgive us when our giving has not grown beyond our safety zone, but you blessed our gifts and us anyway. For those times when we dared to put our foot outside the boat and then sank up to our knees, thank you for not taking your hand away. For all this, we give thanks in the holy name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

It is written: If you do not love your brother whom you can see, you cannot claim to love God who is unseen. We pray for our sisters and brothers, the world over.

Today like every day there are people who are desperately hungry for a slice of bread or a handful of rice, and there are churches and agencies trying to bring them nourishment.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

Today like every day there are people falsely accused and wrongly convicted, or imprisoned for religious and political conviction, and there are churches and agencies trying to set them free.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

Today like every day there are serious injustices perpetuated in our cities and rural communities, and there are churches and agencies trying to bring about change.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

Today like every day there are people accidentally killed and injured, or diseased and dying, shocked and weeping, and there are churches and agencies trying to ease their distress.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

Today like every day there are many unemployed and unwanted, or addicted to alcohol and drugs, or trapped in prostitution and crime, and there are churches and agencies trying to help them.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

Today like every day there is hidden frustration and sorrow, loneliness and fear, mental torment and self-hatred, and there are churches and agencies trying to bring relief.

Loving God, please hear the cry of human need and bless those attempting to answer it.

O God our help in ages past, nothing in space or time can come between you and us; nor can we ever be lost, not even in the immensities of eternity.

In all and above all and through all, keep us close to and aware of the heartbeat of your almighty love. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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

O Jesus I have promised

John E. Bode

O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
remain forever near me, my master and my friend.

I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

Oh, let me feel you near me; the world is ever near.

I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.

My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but Jesus, then draw nearer to shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of selfwill.

Now speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
now speak and make me listen, O Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you
that where you are in glory your servant shall be too.
And Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
oh, give me grace to follow, my master and my friend.

Benediction and Grace

As we go may we be overwhelmed by the generosity of our God and in turn
become overwhelmingly generous in all we do...

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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