

Creationist 2.0

Creating in Pieces

10 September 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 124

Praise the LORD!

Sing to the LORD a new song,

Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.

Let them praise his name with dancing,

making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;

Let the faithful exult in glory;

let them sing for joy on their couches.

This is glory for all his faithful ones.

Praise the LORD!

It is well with my soul

Horatio Gates Spafford, Philip Paul Bliss

When peace like a river attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,

“It is well, it is well with my soul!”

It is well with my soul! It is well, it is well with my soul!

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,

Let this blest assurance control,

That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,

And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—

My sin, not in part, but the whole,

Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll

The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend

Even so, it is well with my soul

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, who holds us close

Overwhelm us with your beauty

Cause our minds and souls to gape with wonder.

Lest we paddle around in the puddle of our scatty knowledge,

Our scrappy faith

Our tatty love.

Cause us to live in awe

To shiver with wonder

To find ourselves out of our depth.

Cause us to sense your glory

To discover ourselves smiled at by a love

Brighter than all the suns in the universe

Deeper than the immensities of outer space.

Gift us that fear that is like a mighty reverential love

Cause that trembling of our souls which is the beginning of wisdom

The source of sane worship.

Loving God, we come to you as typical sample of humanity, to confess our common complicity in evil, and ask for your pardon and assistance.

Our motives are often suspect, our achievements are limited, our virtues are tainted, our love is patchy, and our faith is hardly as big a mustard seed.

We do succeed sometimes, and we are grateful. And we stumble a lot, fail more than we like others to know about.

When we have sinned, we admit feeling more sorry for ourselves than ashamed, and more self-pitying than repentant.

Lord have mercy. *Lord have mercy.*

Christ have mercy. *Christ have mercy.*

Lord have mercy. *Lord have mercy.*

Only you can fix us, healing God.

If like a physiotherapist you have to be cruel to be kind, let it be so.

If like a nurse you need to tend our wounds and urge us to be patient, let it be so.

If like a mother you need to give us your kiss of absolution and send us on our way with new peace and energy, then grant us your Motherly love, we humbly pray.

Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Amen!

We are numbered among those fortunate people who know they have a Saviour. Ours is not to wear failures like a wet blanket, but to accept the saving love of Christ and step out again into the newness of all things. We are to live as the forgiven children of that Holy Parent whose love is without limit.

Thanks be to God!

Notices

The Peace

Dance

Reading Romans 13:8-10

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Reflection

This is a personal reflection as much as anything. It is tempting to read the words, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ and gloss over them, giving little thought to what they might mean in a practical sense. I have been reminded this week that I am quite broken, in the sense that a toy that has been stood on is broken. I don’t say that for your sympathy, I say it because I think that if we are honest we are all that way. We have all been stood on in some way, shape or form and we are broken. And the problem with broken toys is that they don’t quite work the way they are supposed to. Perhaps a wheel has fallen off, or an eye has disappeared. A handle is bent or a leg has been chewed. It doesn’t mean the toy is any less loved. It does mean that it can no longer perform its functions quite the same as it did when it was new. And so, to us. To me. I am broken. I’m pretty good at hiding it, much of the time. I have my fences and walls that are designed to keep people at bay and prevent them from discovering my broken bits. The problem is that for all that

I am good at hiding, the broken comes out in ways I don't expect. People can get hurt, hopes dashed, relationships damaged.

Now there are two things I want to emphasise at this point. The first is that I don't set out to hurt or upset people. I'm pretty sure it is not in my DNA to deliberately cause pain. Often, I don't know that something has gone wrong until after the event. I look around, bewildered at the commotion behind me before realising that it is me who caused it, stupidly unaware and focussed on anything but the problem that has arisen. The second is that for all my lack of awareness stuff still goes wrong and I leave mayhem and destruction in my wake. The fact I am unaware doesn't change the pain caused.

All of which leaves me with the question, 'What can I do about it?' I think the answer comes in the words, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' with a particular emphasis on the words, 'as yourself.' You see, this is not about you feeling sorry for me, or, if you are getting the picture, for yourself. It is about thinking about and acting on how to deal with our broken. When we begin to get real about how broken we are we do have the option to ignore it and carry on with our lives. There's nothing stopping us doing that, but I don't want to spend any words on that pathway. We also have the option of working on our broken, trying, one piece at a time, to repair what is not functioning. It's a life-long process and one in which there will be many side trips and dead-ends. Most days I won't even know if I've made any progress. And I will keep working on it. I think I'm better than I used to be, although that's a fairly low bar. For the rest of my days I intend to keep getting better, one small piece at a time.

Here is where my title comes in. I'm really good at some things. When I do the things I'm really good at I am proud of the results. On the other hand, I'm really bad at other things. When I do those things I am ashamed of the results. So, what do I do? I own that I am good at some things and awful at others. I build up my strengths and I work hard to improve on my weaknesses. Truth is that there will always be weaknesses that I wish would go away. But they are my weaknesses and I won't pretend I don't have them. Then sometimes, just sometimes God will step in and help me with those weaknesses. Somehow, in all of that there are pieces of creating that touch people's lives and give them hope. Could I do better? Yes. Will I give up because it's not good enough? No. Now, I could go on, in fact I think I have in the past, about how sometimes our weaknesses can be God's opportunity to work through us. That's not my point today. What I want to remind myself, and you, is that learning to love myself with my broken bits is incredibly important if I am going to love my neighbour

with all their broken bits. This is where it gets kind of amazing. Because when we take our broken bits and the broken bits of the Other and learn to love them, we become so much more than we could ever be alone.

Come, now is the time

Brian Doerksen

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God
Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now

Celebrate

Gary Oliver

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

He is risen, He is risen
And He lives forevermore
He is risen, He is risen
Come on and celebrate
The resurrection of our Lord

Reading Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about

anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Reflection

I want to begin this reflection with an important premise. We are all broken. We all have our broken come out in different ways and at different times. I can say quite conclusively that you are broken. You may be very good at hiding it, although the chances are you are really only hiding it from yourself. Even the nicest, gentlest person in our congregation is broken in some way. It's not a condemnation to say this. It's not a terrible accusation that requires charge and counter charge. It just is. I am broken. You are broken. It just is.

All of which means that when I read the words, “If another member...,” I find myself rewording it to say, “When another member...” It is not that anyone sets out with the intention of causing pain and disappointment. It is simply that in our personal brokenness we will necessarily cause others to stumble. And it may even be completely innocent on our part. A number of years ago I had a situation where one person was doing their best, in their understanding, to respond to what they felt God was saying to them in the church services. As best I and other elders could determine, the content of what this person was sharing was good. The problem came in the manner they were using to share. It was becoming a significant stumbling block to many others in the congregation. What do you do? They weren't setting out to upset people. It could be argued they were adding value to the services. Our problem was the cost was greater than the benefit.

When approached, this person simply couldn't see what they were doing wrong. I could understand their perspective. They were, in this very specific case, broken.

This of course raises the next question which is what we might mean by, ‘sins against you.’ Does it mean that someone has robbed you or killed your friend or lied to you? Or is it lesser things that have caused you upset? Is it even something that perhaps points to your own broken more than that of the other?

I'm going to go on a slight side-track here. There is no way that Jesus would have been talking about members of the church sinning against each other. There was no church. The rest of his teaching gives no indication that he even had some kind of organisation in mind, ever. This is a later addition by the writer of Matthew to speak to a specific issue that was becoming evident in

what had developed into the church. This is important because we can see that people's broken was just as relevant in the early church as it is today.

Now back to being sinned against. I have a suspicion that the idea of being sinned against has been, for at least the last 2000 years, a rather flexible term. I might even go so far as to suggest that it has probably been weaponised as a way of forcing people to follow a particular set of rules and regulations. Rules that have far more to do with the prevailing culture than with anything Jesus may have said or done.

For that reason, I am going to skip the carefully laid out regulatory instruction and head straight to verse 20. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." As with any set of words these can be twisted to our purpose. I hope I am not twisting them too hard when I suggest that dealing with brokenness is done best when we accept that Jesus is in the room with us. I have a ton of issues with the "What Would Jesus Do?" movement, but they do have a good point if it is not take to extremes. It could perhaps be better expressed as, "What would I do if Jesus was standing next to me?" There is still plenty of wiggle room for our own broken to "break through" as it were, but it perhaps gives us a starting point if we are careful. What all this really amounts to is how willing we are to extend grace to the person who has offended us. I'm not talking about a free pass for bad behaviour. I am talking about how we can love that person and be gracious when we feel sinned against. The astute among you will notice that I didn't say when we have been sinned against. That is because all too often we feel like we have been wronged when the problem is in our perception rather than based in fact. All the more reason to be gracious in our response. Being gracious acknowledges that we only know a piece of the story. Being gracious acknowledges the other also knows a piece of the story. Being gracious gathers the pieces together to form a creation greater than any of us can manage on our own. Paul reminds us that we only know in part. We can perhaps extend that to, we only create in part. We only create in pieces. It is God who gathers them together to form the beautiful whole.

We Pray

God who makes the broken whole again, we come before you now and own our brokenness. We know that no matter how hard we try we will never come close becoming whole by ourselves. We know too that no matter how hard we try we hurt those around us, even those we love, with sad regularity. Help us, in our brokenness to allow you to moderate our pain and the damage it does.

Help us too, to find the grace to serve and to accept others in their pain and brokenness. We long for the day when we can see each of our pieces drawn together to make a beautiful whole. Through Jesus, who is with us in our brokenness, we pray. Amen.

When the music fades

Matt Redman

When the music fades, all is stripped away,
And I simply come
Longing just to bring, something that's of worth
That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself is not what You have required
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about You, all about You Jesus
I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You, all about You Jesus

King of endless worth
No one could express how much You deserve
Though I'm weak and poor
All I have is Yours, every single breath

Offering

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

God of love and compassion, we ask you to dedicate the gifts and offerings we bring to worship. We do this in the hope that you will do more with them than we could ever do on our own to heal the brokenness and division in our world. Remind us that the work of reconciliation does not get removed from our list because we put something in the offering and that mission field is within our arms' reach. This we pray in the redeemer's holy name, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

We offer our prayers for Others and Ourselves
We are amazed to hear of a meteorite coming from interstellar space, found in the Pacific Ocean, and discovered to be formed of an unknown alloy of metals. Forger of rock and mountain, waterfall and volcano we are in awe of this world and beyond.

And we extract its minerals and water and build dams not understanding this web, this great interdependence and its immense connections. We have built 4-lane highways on sheer slopes in mountainous regions of India. The area has endured over 700 landslides during this year's monsoon. The loss of life and devastation covered by this week's news will remain in memories for lifetimes and beyond. Walk with us as we try to make sense of it all.

God of the bedrock, of the ancient aquifer, of the falling rain, you know of its descent into the deep spaces, the glacial water, the thousands of years it takes to create these watery reserves in your eternal time. In our brief time, we have created dust bowls and despoiled once pristine lands.

In our time we use water as though there was "no tomorrow" and are drying up ground water, even deep wells, reducing grain yields, creating fissures and faults in the earth as it sinks. When we pray "Give us our daily bread!" help us to connect to the land, the water and people – the millions who are starving across Somalia, Yemen, Haiti, Zambia, Sudan, Chad, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Timor-Leste.

Great Healer,

Replace our hopelessness with compassion.

Restore truth and respect to our words and actions.

Remind us of our students, teachers, scientists and journalists, the earnest hearts and minds that quest and thirst, that stand on the earth calling to one another "Hey there!" "I see you!" "Come, read." "Tell me what you think!" "Hear my story!"

Rekindle the 'hearth of the world' breathing upon its embers. Hear our voices of wisdom and prudence, confidence and courage and shared resolve.

Bless the humanitarians, the comforters and the peacemakers.

Bless us and those we love as we wrestle with the ups and downs of life

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

I cannot tell

W. Y. Fullerton

I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship,
Should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back they know not how or when.
But this I know, that He was born of Mary,
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently He suffered,
As with His peace He graced this place of tears,
Or how His heart upon the Cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King.

Benediction and Grace

As we go may we remember that grace can overcome brokenness...

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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