

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Abundant

17 September 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 68

After Israel left Egypt, Judah became holy land for him,
Israel the place of holy rule.

**Sea took one look and ran the other way;
River Jordan turned around and ran off.
The mountains turned playful and skipped like rams,
the hills frolicked like spring lambs.**

What's wrong with you, Sea, that you ran away?
and you, River Jordan, that you turned and ran off?
And mountains, why did you skip like rams?
and you, hills, frolic like spring lambs?

**Tremble, Earth! You're in the Lord's presence!
in the presence of Jacob's God.
He turned the rock into a pool of cool water,
turned flint into fresh spring water.**

Rejoice, the Lord is King

Charles Wesley

Rejoice, the Lord is King,
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing
And triumph evermore:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.

Jesus, the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love:
When He had purged our stains
He took His seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail;
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n:

Rejoice in Glorious Hope,
Jesus the Judge shall come;
And take his Servants up
To their Eternal Home:

We soon shall hear th' Archangel's Voice,
The Trump of GOD shall sound, Rejoice.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Daffodils bloom
Fruit trees bud
Once dormant shrubs spring to life
Colour greets us at every turn
God's handiwork lights our way

Lambs cry to their mothers
Birds prepare nests
Gardeners prune and plant
The newness of Spring
Living hope

Open our eyes to see you near us
Gift us ears to hear your whisper of love
Grant us hearts ready to commune with you
Minds ready to work with you
Fill us with delight and hope
Generous with all we have received

We know we are frail and weak creatures, but not as frail as we sometimes pretend. Please unmask our pretences.

We know we are foolish creatures, but not as foolish as our irresponsibility would often suggest. Please expose our excuses.

We know we are sinful creatures, but not as hopeless as we act in times of self-pity. Please deliver us from self-deceit.

Most loyal Friend, merciful judge and tireless saviour, confront us with the truth. Assist us to accept responsibility, both for our failures and for our many talents.

Where deep within we need forgiveness and healing, come with your Spirit and renew the fabric of our souls.

Where we need a greater faith in ourselves, come with your Spirit and restore our confidence as children of the Most High.

Where we need purer faith in you, come with your Spirit to consolidate the faith we do have and to enlarge our capacity for more.

In the name of him who loved us and gave himself for us, we pray. Amen!

The Peace

Notices

Reading [Matthew 18:21-35](#)

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Reflection

Here's a question for you. Why is forgiveness so difficult? It is difficult to be forgiving. It is difficult to be forgiven. Why? What is it about our human condition that leaves us struggling with this foundational aspect of being in community?

Think about it this way. I think it is fair to say that we all screw up. We all make mistakes. We all damage things. We are broken. That is simply how it is.

Now consider that with few exceptions we need other people around us to function as human beings. We need the interaction, the conversations, the shared activities, the working and playing together. It seems to be one of the identifying features of being human.

If we put these two things together we are going to get clashes and fights and disagreements. There is simply no way that two broken people in one room are not going to fight in some way, shape or form.

All of which might lead an objective observer to conclude that for humans to function socially, forgiveness is an essential ingredient in all they do. I forgive you. I am forgiven by you. Not as some thought exercise, but as a practical requirement for maintaining community.

So why is it so hard? It is almost as if we fight and struggle against the glue that binds us together even as it is obvious how much we need it.

I certainly don't have a full set of solutions. I do have a suggestion that might help us to think differently about forgiveness. What if the reason we find it difficult to forgive and be forgiven is because we are worried? Worried about what forgiving might require of us, now and in the future. Worried in case forgiveness comes at a cost we are not prepared to pay. Worried that the cost might mean that we have less in the future. Less of what we cannot define. Perhaps one reason it is so difficult to forgive is that we have the poverty mentality I talked about recently. The idea that I don't have enough. That there isn't enough to go around. I think this perspective on life is a thief. It steals our joy and our hope and it steals our freedom. We become locked in a cage of never having enough, never able to see beyond our sense of scarcity. Some of you will be old enough to remember the way scarcity shaped an entire generation, perhaps more than one generation of New Zealanders before and during the war years. I have heard many stories of people barely managing to scrape by and learning to make do with the bare minimum. That created in

people a deep and very understandable need to carefully husband resources and make sure that nothing was ever wasted. And that is a good thing. Until it is not. Until it becomes a blockage to using our resources to the glory of God.

It's certainly not just a church thing. In fact a wonderful example of this kind of blockage is the Christchurch Cathedral. Some in the wider community decided that their husbanding of resources extended to insisting that the Anglican Church rebuild the Cathedral, even though it was clear that as far as the church was concerned it was a white elephant that no longer suited the needs of its people.

On a local level we see church councils so worried about their finances that they cease investing in the kingdom of God. The buildings are carefully maintained but mission can be seen as a risky and expensive chore that whittles away at scarce resources. I don't think that is happening here, but the risk is ever present.

You might be wondering what this has to do with forgiveness. I want to suggest that the attitude of being forgiving and receiving forgiveness is closely aligned with how we treat our physical resources. Something I have observed over the years is that for the most part, those who are generous with their resources tend to be generous in their forgiving. They are less likely to hold grudges and more likely to find the good in others.

And so, to our reading. Jesus tells this story about the slave who has been forgiven much and then denies forgiveness to someone who owes much less. The problem is that we can become wrapped up in the amounts forgiven and not forgiven and fail to realise an important point. This slave was going to be like this no matter what happened to him. His coming across a fellow slave in the story is merely a happy coincidence for the story. His heart was governed by a poverty mentality. There was not enough to go around for this slave. He had to insist on repayment irrespective of whether he had been forgiven.

It comes down to an attitude that is devoid of generosity. There is no sense of the abundance of God at work in his life and it leads to what are called transactional relationships. These are relationships that exist purely on the basis of what is exchanged between parties. For the most part you have a transactional relationship with the person on the checkout at the supermarket. You smile, exchange pleasantries and leave having paid your money and received your groceries. A transaction has occurred, but there is no depth to the relationship. The strange thing is that transactional relationships are

remarkably common in the church. You get something, I get something and we go away satisfied, but without any form of lasting relationship. There is no sense of abundance so generosity is less common, and forgiveness is hard to come by. I suspect that we are frequently more like the unforgiving slave that we care to admit. Thankfully, that's not the end of the story.

Amazing Love

Billy James Foote

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken
I'm accepted, You were condemned
I am alive and well, Your spirit is within me
Because You died and rose again

Amazing love, how can it be?
That You, my King would die for me?
Amazing love, I know its true
It's my joy to honour You
In all I do, I honour You

You are my King

Reading Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Reflection

I think I am standing on fairly safe ground when I suggest that our God is a God of abundance. The God who created the heavens and the earth and populated the earth with plants and wildlife and human beings doesn't do things by half measures. When this God of abundance forgives it is with abundant generosity, our sin sent as far as the east is from the west. Erased from memory, wiped from history. That doesn't mean the consequences disappear, but that is for another day.

One of the results of being forgiving is that we are less likely to judge in the sense of casting doom upon an offender. Rather than using differences of opinion or practice to get in the way of a healthy relationship, a forgiving person looks for ways to grow and strengthen relationship.

I love how Paul begins this passage. Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. How common it is to find someone we can look down on and then lord it over them. I am better than you. I am stronger than you. I am smarter than you. Look, I can eat anything I like, I am so much better than someone who will only eat vegetables. Look, I support Labour or National or Act or the Greens, I am so much better than anyone who supports the others. Look, I know and believe everything the Bible says. I am so much better than anyone who has doubts about some of it. Look, I only sing old hymns, well, at least hymns that are older than me. Apart from some of those new songs I like – they're like hymns. I'm so much better than those who prefer to sing those silly choruses.

“Wait,” says Paul, “back the truck up!” That's not what this Christian stuff is all about. Our faith is in an abundant God who welcomes everyone – the strong and the weak. God can make anyone stand, even supporters of political parties. This is where things get good. Remember the unforgiving slave who had lost their sense of generosity and held everything tightly lest they lose some part it. Remember how closely you and I resemble that slave. It doesn't

have to be that way. There are some things we can do to turn our hearts around and learn to become generous people living out lives of abundance.

The first thing is to stop judging. Stop judging yourself and stop judging others. There are no ifs or buts about this. Don't search for the verses that suggest you might get to do some judging. Let God be the judge. When you see something you don't like and you begin to get on your high horse. Stop. Just stop. Put the excuses and justifications to one side and leave the judging to God.

The second thing is to be thankful. Be thankful for what you have. Be thankful for what you don't have. Be thankful for the other and what they have and don't have. Be thankful for the opportunity to be thankful. It's amazing how generous we become when we are grateful for what we have. If you have something going wrong, it might be failing eyesight or reduced mobility or any one of a million things that go wrong in our lives, be thankful. Search for something, no matter how small, and give thanks for it.

The third thing is to acknowledge that we all stand before God in the end. We are all on a level playing field. There is nothing you can do in this life that will make you better than all the people you will stand next to out the other end. Holding that in mind can reduce the temptation to treat others in the same way the slave treated his colleague.

We could list more ways to become generous people who create out of a sense of abundance. I think if we work on these three things we will find ourselves making some pretty good progress and God will likely chip in with ideas as we go. In the end I want to suggest that as God's people we are called to live abundant lives, being generous with others because God has been generous to us. How will you create more abundantly this week?

We Pray

Thank you, God, for being so generous to us, for filling our lives with your abundant love and care. Thank you for the abundance of your forgiveness toward us. Help us to become a people who are truly generous – not grudgingly but with abundant hearts. Teach us to search out opportunities to practice our generosity, learning to give not because we must but because our lives are overflowing with everything you have given us. Mold our hearts so we become generous in our forgiveness toward others. Then we can worship you in spirit and in truth because your love has become our love. Through Jesus, who was generous with his very life, we pray. Amen.

Jesus, we enthrone you

Paul Kyle

Jesus, we enthrone You

We proclaim You are king

Standing here, in the midst of us

We raise You up with our praise

And as we worship build Your throne

And as we worship build Your throne

And as we worship build Your throne

Come Lord Jesus and take Your place

Offering

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

Generous God, you have given so much to us in love and joy – every good thing in our life reflects your caring. Even in the giving of our offerings, we have tried to give our best but know we could do more. In a world where forgiveness has become a rare commodity, it is often an asset we hold back to maintain power over one another. Help us to hear the teaching of Jesus in the generosity of forgiveness. May we learn to give that to others with wild extravagance! We pray in Christ's name, who gave all. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the people of Morocco who experienced a powerful 6.8 magnitude earthquake, with a death toll of nearly three thousand people and more than five thousand more incurring injuries.

For Libya and all her people, as they continue to search for more than ten thousand missing people after massive amounts of rainfall caused destruction to the dams outside Derna. More than five thousand people are reported dead, with over thirty thousand more left homeless and in unsafe conditions.

For Brazil who experienced heavy rains and floods in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, causing the death of over thirty people.

God of earth, water, and sky: You are with every living being impacted by these natural disasters. Infuse the survivors with strength and courage, for their journey will be long and hard. Cradle those who grieve the loss of their loved ones, homes, and freedom. Shine light perpetual upon those who have died.

We pray for the feeding of the hungry in body or spirit, and for the healing of those who are dis-eased in body or mind.

We pray for the comfort of the suffering and the grieving, and for the befriending of the lonely, timid, or socially awkward people.

We pray for the humbling of the church if it becomes proud, and for courage wherever it is shunned or persecuted.

We pray for the strong and the weak in this congregation, and for the spiritual health of all other churches in the community.

You, Holy Friend, are more eager to give than we are to receive. Deal firmly with your servants gathered here now, that we get rid of everything that clutters our souls and make way for all the new blessings you have in store for us. Through Christ Jesus our Lord. 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

What a friend we have in Jesus

Joseph Medlicott Scriven

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we become more generous as we discover the abundant life that is God's gift to each and all of us...

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.

BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS: WAITAKI PRESBYTERIAN PARISH 02-0940-0018657-00