

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Abundant II

24 September 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,

Praise the Lord

To God be the glory

Fanny Crosby

To God be the glory, great things He hath done,

So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,

Who yielded His life our redemption to win,

And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

Let the earth hear His voice;

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

Let the people rejoice;

Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,

And give Him the glory; great things He hath done.

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,

To every believer the promise of God;

The vilest offender who truly believes,

That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,

And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;

But purer, and higher, and greater will be

Our wonder, our transport when Jesus we see.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession – Bethne Dodd

You are a more-than God.

More than able. More than enough. More than we can ever hope to fully understand.

You choose to reveal yourself to us in ways which draw us to You...

Through creation's beauty and diversity.

Through salvation's overwhelming love.

For this we thank You.

Yet, where Your abundance flows,

rather than extravagant generosity of Spirit we often see waste.

Water transforming into finest wine – unwarranted.

Empty nets groaning with fish – unnecessary.

Meagre loaves and fish, feeding thousands plus leftovers – unfathomable.

Vineyard workers, rocking up no matter the time of day, receiving equal pay – unfair.

A woman pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet then drying them with her hair – unacceptable.

If we're not careful a touch of the Judas mentality creeps in – what a waste... of resources, of reputation.

Calm down God. That'll do. Just enough to get by is fine, thankyou.

What's with the overabundance?

This outpouring of plenty, of grace and compassion.

Of undeserved kindness, inclusion, forgiveness.

All a bit much really. How embarrassing.

None of Your way makes sense... at first.

Think big, You say.

We make do with small.

Think of others, You say.

We make do with ourselves.

No wonder we are poor.

No wonder we lack.

Give, You encourage us.

Give and it shall be given to you – sounds good.

Give and do not count the cost – not quite as good.

The same measure we use for others will be used for us – far from good with that.

Open-handed, Generous-to-a-fault God, You have blessed us with so much. Remind us, again and again, how Jesus gave his very life for us and held nothing back.

Remind us, how Your great gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon us. and remains with us to this day.

Forgive us our grasping attitudes.

Free us from our poverty mindsets.

Fill us to overflowing with Your all-embracing love so we may bless others, in turn, with the same blessing we ourselves have freely received.

Amen

The Peace

Notices

Reading Philippians 1:21-30

²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Reflection

So that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. Wow! I wonder if Paul could say that about me. I wonder if there would be any abundant sharing in my boasting in Christ Jesus if he came to visit. Implicit in his statement is that the joy and progress of my faith will be so amazing that he will be able to revel in it. Then I look at my joy and progress, or lack thereof, and wonder at his vast imagination that I should be able to

provide him such pleasure. It is likely that most of us feel the same way. Our first response is to ask, 'Who, me?' closely followed by, 'Couldn't be.' So, it sets me to wondering.

I wonder about our experience of faith. The mountain tops and the valleys, the wide highways and the narrow twisting backroads, the encouragement of gathered worship and the daily grind of everyday living. It can be a relief to come up for air once a week on a Sunday, slough off the muck of the last six days and refresh our faith. Connecting with friends, singing familiar songs, hearing familiar stories. There is a gentle joy in the weekly traditions that allows us to head into the next few days with a sense of, 'I can do this.' None of which sits comfortably with the idea of someone coming to share abundantly in our boasting in Christ Jesus. For the most part none of our daily lives feel particularly abundant and our boasting in Christ is, perhaps, more limited that we might like to admit. This also sets me to wondering.

I wonder about our expectations of faith. The Mother Teresas and the Thomases, the Martin Luther Kings and the Judases. How we measure ourselves against impossible standards and compare ourselves with imagined saints and sinners. I couldn't possibly come up to the level of Mother Teresa but I'm definitely not about to betray Jesus. I am comfortable to sit, hopefully unnoticed, among the quiet majority, preferably unheard and unseen. I don't long to turn the world upside down. At least, not at this stage of my life. I am deeply grateful when my day goes somewhat as I expected it to, without any turning up or down. Nothing of what I do or even want feels at all abundant. This too, sets me to wondering.

I wonder about what it means to stand firm in one spirit. If the gently joy of gathering around some familiar songs and prayers gives me hope for tomorrow. If the quiet, unseen majority is where I am most comfortable. How then do I strive for the gospel? Is it my fault that the church I know and love is fading away? Am I a shallow, inadequate Christian failing to follow in the footsteps of the early church? Or is there more to the story than I can quite grasp?

I suspect these are questions that most Christians ask, either out loud or behind closed doors. Particularly as we get older our memories of the glorious days of our youth suggest to us that we have lost our first love and we have failed to change anything about the world, much less turn it upside down. When we read of Paul sharing abundantly in our joy and faith we can feel like we have failed, even become failures, as we look around at empty churches

and families who no longer worship as we have done all our lives. It becomes easy to feel intimidated by our opponents, those who try to tell us the church is no longer relevant, that society has moved on from needing a crutch in their lives. We shrug our shoulders and sigh and say, 'Oh well, there's nothing I can do about that.' And it makes me wonder.

I wonder if we have created an impossible scenario in our minds. We have allowed ourselves to imagine a perfect world where everything goes exactly as it should and nothing is ever out of place. Every Christian should be strong and courageous, a Joshua, a Ruth, an Esther, a David, a Mary, a Peter. Completely forgetting that all these heroes of the Bible were fallen, mistake ridden characters who would have been far more comfortable in our living rooms than in their gilded stories. We tell ourselves that we are so much less than we should be (a terrible word, should) and that these Biblical characters, among many others, are the geniuses and stars we should be emulating.

Then Paul writes this to the Philippians: "You are having the same struggle that you saw I had." Paul isn't writing to the winners of the World Cup. He's not even writing to the winners of the local derby. He is writing to the normal, mostly not winners of anything, people of a small, struggling church. He knows they don't have any Mother Teresas or Martin Luthers. They have tired bones and weary legs. They struggle to pray. They have arguments over what to sing at church and where to sit. Everything about them is ordinary. And knowing that, Paul longs to come and be encouraged by their very ordinariness.

Because it is in their struggles to live life as best they can that an abundance appears. It is not an abundance of the fireworks of life. It is an abundance of the gentle grace that flows from doing the best you can with what you have. I look around at all the people who hold me in high regard, thinking they could never do what I do, never realising that I can do what I do because of them. Your encouragement and generosity toward me allows me to share in the abundance of your joy and faith. And whether we care to believe it or not, those simple smiles and kind words, can change the world, even turn it upside down, for those who receive them.

Perhaps it is time to accept that our quiet, unseen faith carries an equally unseen yet abundant hope to the world. A hope that does give an answer, often unspoken but no less heard, to the opponents who would tell us we have no relevance. And this is God's doing, no less.

Let all creation sing

Paul Zach, Andy Zipf

Let all creation sing before the Lord
and every nation of the earth rejoice,
let all the trees lift a shout of joy
for the Lord is King.

Let the deep waters of the sea resound,
let every mountain, every hill sing out,
let all the fields make a joyful sound
for the Lord is King.

Mighty river, barren desert,
howling wind and stormy weather,
every canyon every valley,
sing your praise and give him glory.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

Every star and constellation,
every wonder in the heavens,
silver moon and supernova,
sing a shining hallelujah!

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

Honey bees and weeping willows,
grizzly bears and armadillos,
every narwhal and sea otter,
every son and every daughter.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord
La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord

Reading

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Reflection

What does it mean to be fair? It seems to be a built-in concept from the earliest age that we need to be ‘fair.’ Sometimes fair means equal – equal treatment, equal portions. Sometimes fair means reasonable. Sometimes fair means that you are treated or rewarded in proportion to what you have done. That might be fair pay for a day’s work, or fair punishment for a crime committed. Children will very quickly pick up on what they view as unfair treatment. It’s not fair that I have to go to bed before she does. It’s not fair that he got a bigger piece of cake than I did.

So, when Jesus tells this story of the workers in the vineyard and their complaint the concept of fairness is front and centre. It’s not fair that I work all day in the hot sun and be paid the same as someone who came late and only worked for an hour. I suspect all of us can relate to that feeling of being treated unevenly. Yes, we agreed to these terms. But the person next to me

got better terms. That's not fair! It's not a practice I follow in general, but I remember some years ago purchasing an expensive item. I don't remember what it was, but I was most put out when the same item was advertised the next day with a 25% discount. I went back to the store and asked for the discount to be applied. Somewhat to my surprise the store refunded me the difference. My sense of fairness had pushed me to challenge the store's practice. They would have been fully justified in refusing my request and credit to them for agreeing to help me out.

I am quite sure that if I was offered \$100 to do a job and then discovered that someone else had been offered \$100 to do half the job my sense of fair would kick in.

The story Jesus tell speaks to our sense of fairness and how it can sometimes get out of joint. If I agree to complete a task for a defined reward and then receive that reward, then I have been treated fairly. It is none of my business what someone else might be paid for the work they do. It is true that we like to make it our business. And we are quite good at comparing oranges to apples to justify our opinions. In the story the grumbles are met with the question, 'Are you envious because I am generous?' Of course, it is a valid question. And we know the answer to the question. Yes, they are envious because of the generosity of the landowner. Is it the fault of the landowner? Clearly not. Is it the fault of those hired late in the day. Again, clearly not. So, who is at fault in this conundrum of fairness versus unfairness. The answer is that no-one is at fault. Unless we challenge the hurt feelings of the people who are complaining. And this is where it gets interesting. Jesus tells this story in response to Peter's question about pay rates. The disciples have left everything to follow Jesus, and they want to know what they will get in return. It is an approach reflected in the mother of James and John asking they be seated on Jesus' right and left in the kingdom. It is a story that is constantly replayed in politics as the wealthy argue they deserve what they have, and the poor are kept silent lest their needs encroach on the power and wealth held by the vocal minority. What is fair? I worked for what I have, I should be allowed to enjoy it. The unspoken charge being that someone in a menial job doesn't work as hard as a millionaire. The entire conversation is based, yet again, in a poverty mentality. There is not enough to go around. Therefore, I do my utmost to protect what I have.

And so, to the generous God who works out of an attitude of abundance. It is a, 'Yes, we can,' approach to life. The question of fair is not, 'Did I get

something equivalent to the person next to me?’ It is the question, ‘Did I get what I need to live well?’ To be honest, I think it raises all sorts of questions around how Christians in the west think compared to those living in the Global South in particular in regard to our use of physical resources. But for us, for now, the gentle grace that flows from a God who knows us intimately and who deals with us with abundant forgiveness and mercy is central. Fair or not fair is the wrong question to be asking. ‘Do you know how deeply loved you truly are?’ is a much better question to ask. Closely followed by, ‘May I demonstrate God’s love with my quiet, unseen faith?’

We Pray

God of abundant grace and mercy, we know that by many standards we are abject failures as Christians. All around us we see the response of a society that sees us as irrelevant and useless. Others have toiled all day in the sun and we have gained the same payment for our limited utility. Gift us eyes to see ourselves as you see us. As loved children of God. Teach us to live your answer to our broken and failing world. Show us how to demonstrate your love in the totally unfair manner of generosity and abundance you have shown to us. Through Jesus who lived a life of abundance we pray. Amen.

Do something beautiful

Graham Kendrick

We are a shining light
City on a hill that can't be hidden
A shining light
And this shining light
Is the life of Jesus in us, Oh what a light
The fire of his Spirit burns
With justice, joy and peace
And works through our hands and feet

Go do something beautiful
In the name of Jesus
Do something beautiful
Go do something Jesus would
Do something beautiful
Do something beautiful

We are the salt of the earth
Here to purify and flavour, salt of the earth

Sent through all the earth
To love God and love our neighbour, salt of the Earth
As freely as we received
So freely we must give
And we are his hands and feet

Let your light so shine
Before the world
That all may see
The good you do
And give their praise
To God our Father

Offering

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

God of endless patience, we know that the sound of our complaining is not the music that pleases your ears. We complain about the food that is under or overcooked, and you hear the stomachs that have no food. We whine about the bed being too soft, and you see instead those whose bed is the sidewalk or the floor of a cell. May the offering we bring today be an act of praise that drowns out the noise of our complaining. May it find its way to bring comfort to your children who have little or nothing; and when that happens, may it be joy for your eyes and ears. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/54SUN25.htm>

God who watches from afar and who stands beside, you are the hope of all who call upon your name, teach us to pray with our hearts as well as with our lips, with our actions as well as our thoughts.

We pray for our family members and dear friends, who are special to us.

Bless those who are doing it tough: The unemployed or work-weary, handicapped or enduring pain, those trying to break a drug habit, coping with mental illness, or facing a slow death, and especially those who have no faith to guide and encourage them.

Bless those who have big decisions to make: Whether to have surgery or not, or to change jobs, or return to study and retrain, or shift house, or to stay in a difficult marriage, move interstate or overseas, or to take legal action against an injustice.

Bless those who are enjoying life: The happily married, those expecting a new baby, the ones who are successful in sport, those promoted at

work, the ones who are newly in love, those who have a secure and growing faith, any who celebrate a birthday or anniversary.

We pray for those outside the circle of our loves ones. For neighbours and work colleagues, strangers in the street, our enemies and the host of people who are only faces and names in news programmes.

Bless them according to their respective needs we pray. Everything we ask for our loved ones we also ask for them.

Bless those who are doing it tough. Bless those who are facing difficult decisions. Bless those whose who are enjoying life.

Bless those who are trying to be reconciling agents wherever war and terrorism is happening. Be with those victims of war, those soldiers forced to fight against their better judgment, civilians losing home, limbs or life, and the host of young orphans.

For every human being we seek the guiding, nurturing, inspiring friendship of the Holy Spirit, the redeeming, challenging, healing love of Christ Jesus, and the undergirding, enfolding, ever-enduring love of God.

To you be given all trust and thanksgiving, love and praise, today and forever. 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

When we walk with the Lord

John H. Sammis

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

But we never can prove
The delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do;
Where He sends, we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we live ungenerously to the glory of God...

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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