

Creationist 2.0

Creating Loves Deeply

29 October 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust, and say, “Turn back, you mortals.”

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past,

Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—

O prosper the work of our hands!

I serve a risen Saviour

Alfred Henry Ackley

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.

I know that He is living, whatever men may say.

I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer;

And just the time I need Him He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!

He walks with me and talks with me a

Along life's narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me I see His loving care,

And though my heart grows weary, I never will despair;

I know that He is leading, Through all the stormy blast;

The day of His appearing Will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, Lift up your voice and sing

Eternal hallelujahs To Jesus Christ the King!

The Hope of all who seek Him, The Help of all who find,

None other is so loving, So good and kind.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of wonder and joy

God of surprise and hope

God of welcome and solace

God of peace and love

We come

Filled with wonder at this world we live in

Filled with joy in the quiet moments

Filled with surprise at the bursting of spring

Filled with hope for the fruits of summer

Filled with the welcome you offer each day

Filled with solace for our losses and grief

Filled with your peace amidst bustle and noise

Filled with your love unexpected, undeserved

We come

Our cup overflows with your mercy and grace

Loved beyond measure

Pressed down

Shaken together

Flowing over

More than we could ever imagine

Forgive us, God, for those times we grimly commiserate on how difficult life is while giving no thought to the blessings you bring us. Forgive us for losing sight of the wonder and joy and surprise and hope you offer. Forgive us for becoming lost in ourselves and failing to see you in every moment of our day.

We bring our private confessions to you now...

Tell my people I love them. Called to know love in place of condemnation.

Called to experience grace in the face of despair. Called to be my people in this place and this time. In Christ. Amen.

The Peace

Notices

Reading

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. ³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Reflection

Creating is never simple. When we create something, no matter what it is, we invest ourselves in whatever it is we are working on. It may be as simple as a cake or a small garden. It may be as complex as a new job or even a family. Whatever it is we are creating there is more to it than simply snapping our fingers and behold, a new 'thing' appears. But wait, there's more. Another layer to creating is how we think about what we are creating. Is it purely out of necessity, to get a job done, to move on to things we would rather do? Or is it more than that? Is it a labour of love, driven by a desire to do the best we can with what we have?

Let me illustrate with a personal example. I have done a lot of driving this week. A bit over 1200km in total. To be honest, quite enough for one week and I am feeling fairly tired. Then last night my daughter called, quite distressed. Her oldest boy, who is nearly 5, is a wonderful ball of challenges. He hates being in one place for more than a few minutes at a time and is a regular Houdini when it comes to escaping. He has recently taken to climbing the fence into the neighbour's property and playing in places that are not safe for little people. Unfortunately, he has also been helping his little brother to escape as well, something that needs no encouragement. Part of his problem is that he has no sense of danger, at all. Some small people are fearful of what they don't know or of hurting themselves. None of that with him. So Alisha called last night to tell me that he had escaped, yet again, and had little

brother along for the run. Only, she could work out where he had gone, but there was no sign of little brother. Of course she panicked as she hunted high and low and finally found him being carried toward her by a couple of women out for a walk. An awful experience for a mother.

This has led to Sam, my son-in-law, purchasing some materials to bolster the fencing before he goes to work on the West Coast on Monday. I knew he was going to struggle to get done what needed doing in time, so I have offered to go to Christchurch tomorrow, returning in the evening, to help with the fence reinforcing. Alisha's first reaction was, 'Dad, you're so busy.' My reaction was, 'And my grandson is incredibly important as are you and the rest of your family.' Yes, I am busy, and I am tired. And this is, for me, a labour of love. It is a task driven by a desire to do the best I can with what I have.

When I read verse 8 from 1 Thessalonians 2 it rang so very true with me. 'So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.' I have begun to realise over the last few years that the church I have been a part of my whole life has, over the last few years, to a large extent, majored on sharing the gospel and minored on sharing ourselves. By that I am not referring to individuals who so often do share of themselves deeply. But there is little said from the pulpit about that sharing. It has been left to this person here and that person there to do what they can. Perhaps helping with the foodbank or packing parcels for Christmas. Maybe sharing a meal with a lonely person or visiting someone stuck at home. But let's go deeper than that. Paul came to the Thessalonians, 'like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.' Take a moment to think about the small children you are closest to or have been closest to. Think about how you respond to them. You would do anything within your power to care for them and look after them. And this is where I think we can begin to learn a deep lesson about our faith. We are created to create. To create in this amazing world. What we create is unique to each of us. By creating we acknowledge our Creator. When we create with love and the desire to do the best we can, no matter what it is we are creating, we are giving glory and honour to our Creator. That is rather special.

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 [Matthew 22:34-40](#)

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Reflection

Why do you test someone? Sometimes it is to see what they know. To work out their competencies and see whether they are ready to go to the next level. Or perhaps to see if they are as good as they say they are. School exams or license testing are good examples.

Other times it is to put someone on the spot. To make life difficult for them or show them up in front of others. If I can set you a task that you can't perform then that makes me look better by way of contrast. It tells other people that I am better than you. Playground fights are often a good example of this kind of testing in action. Look to Parliament and we see playground fights taken to the next level and justified because the people doing the fighting get to make the rules.

The test we see in Matthew is more of the playground variety. The Pharisees are trying to put Jesus on the spot with what they view as a trick question. They had 613 laws. Felony laws – like don't kill someone and low level laws –

like give a tenth of your dill and mint. They ranked their laws, but all the laws were considered equally great because they were all given by God. To their surprise, Jesus answered with a double-edged sword. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind,' was an answer that most Pharisees would have likely given. The thing is, it was an answer you would expect from a trained theologian, not a semi-literate peasant like Jesus. So that was surprise one. The second edge to the sword was to, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' To a legalistic rule follower this was a devastating blow. Love and rules rarely coexist easily. One reason for this uneasy relationship is that love will often sidestep rules to ensure that the Other is cared for. Love sees rules as necessary boundaries that don't always fit the situation and will move those boundaries when they get in the way of serving the Other. A nice example is that of the Good Samaritan. The rules-bound pharisees and leaders exhibited no love as they strove to follow the law. It was the love-filled Samaritan who stepped over the boundaries to serve the wounded traveller.

I can hear Jesus asking the Pharisees, 'Will you love your neighbour like the nurse tenderly caring for her own children?' The Pharisees look around at each other and have no response because they understand that from the Ten Commandments on down, loving God and loving your neighbour are absolutely central. Remove either one of these commandments and the whole of the law – all 613 of them – come crashing down.

And so the test spins around and puts them on the spot. If Jesus had simply stopped at loving God everyone would have shrugged their shoulders and moved on. By broadening the focus to include how we treat our Other, our question suddenly becomes more than an intellectual exercise. It is no longer merely a legally interesting enquiry designed to show up someone's lack of training. Now it takes aim at people's behaviour toward their Other. Now it is about what I do, not just what I think. Now it is about how deeply I love the Other in the face of all those rules that I find so important.

On the surface Jesus' answer seems pretty obvious. I do wonder how often we allow that answer to gloss over all the ways we creatively invent to avoid truly loving our Other. I dare not associate with those people lest I be tainted by them. I think their habits are disgusting, I don't want anything to do with them. They're dirty, they smell bad, their houses are disgusting. I don't agree with their politics. I don't agree with their opinions on climate, on economics, on freedom of speech, on race, on ... the list goes on. Now I don't have to love them. I can push them away because they are Other. And Jesus says, 'Love

your Other as you love yourself. It is as important as loving God with all your heart and soul and mind.' Perhaps when you get the balance right you will begin to create as I have made you to create.

We Pray

God of deep and abiding love. We are often so slow to see how loving you is only one part of the equation of life. You have made us to be in community at our very heart. And being in community is so very hard. Especially when we don't like some of our community. Help us to learn how to love our Other like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. Help us to learn to love our Other as we love ourselves. Help us to create with love and desire to do the best we can and to give you all the glory and honour. Through Jesus who loved and loved and loved again. Amen.

Just let me say

Geoff Bullock

Just let me say how much I love You
Let me speak of Your mercy and grace
Just let me live in the shadow of Your beauty
Let me see You face to face
And the earth will shake as Your Word goes forth
And the heavens can tremble and fall
But let me say how much I love You
O my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Just let me hear Your finest whispers
As You gently call my name
And let me see Your power and Your glory
Let me feel Your Spirit's flame
Let me find You in the desert
'Til this sand is holy ground
And I am found completely surrendered
To You, my Lord and friend

So let me say how much I love You
With all my heart I long for You
For I am caught in this passion of knowing
This endless love I've found in you
And the depth of grace and forgiveness found
To be called a child of God

Just makes me say how much I love You
Oh my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Offering

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

God of unimaginable love, you have given us so much and asked so little. Jesus calls us to love you with our whole being, love our neighbours, and love ourselves. For that simple price, you have given us everything and promised to love us and not desert us. It is a covenant more generous than anyone could imagine, and yet how often we fail to keep the bargain. We love you when it is convenient and will not embarrass us before others. We pick and choose which neighbours we love. as we pick and choose when we will love ourselves. As we dedicate our gifts this morning to bringing acts of love, may we also resolve to better keep our side of your covenant of love. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the people of Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Armenia, Yemen, Haiti, Venezuela and all the other countries around the world wracked by violence and fighting.

For leaders around the world as they wrestle with economics and demographics and politics

For the leaders of our country, nationally and locally, as they work to serve our communities and do their best to build a better future

For the churches of our community, new and old, strong and struggling, busy and aimless. For the pastors and ministers. For the councils and leaders.

For ourselves, our friends and families, our hopes and dreams and fears and disappointments. Those who are unwell. Those who are travelling.

All these things we pray through Christ who taught us this prayer...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is 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

The King of Love

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

Benediction and Grace

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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