

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Grounded*

12 November 2023

### Call to Worship – Psalm 78

We will tell to the coming generation

**The glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.**

He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;

**That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children,**

So that they should set their hope in God,

**And not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;**

### He Kororia

*Ally Palmer*

He kororia ki te Atua

Glory to God

He kororia ki te Atua

Glory to God

He whakairo pai ki nga tangata katoa Good news to all people

He kororia ki te Atua

Glory to God

God most high

We pray your peace and grace

In all the world

Emmanuel most high

We pray your peace and grace

In all the world

### How great Thou art

*Carl Boberg*

Oh Lord, my God

When I, in awesome wonder

Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made

I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder

Thy power throughout the universe displayed

Whakaaria mai tou ripeka ki au  
Tiaho mai ra roto i te po  
Hei kona au titiro atu ai  
Ora, mate hei au koi noho ai ai ai

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing  
He bled and died to take away my sin

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart  
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration  
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

### [Prayer of Adoration and Confession](#)

What does it mean to be a whole person?

Is it complete and unblemished  
Zero mistakes and perfect pitch?  
Because I'm not one of those

Is it accomplished and titled  
Able to perform whatever is necessary  
Anytime and anywhere?  
Because I'm not one of those

Is it strong and brave  
Intelligent, thoughtful and self-aware  
Always ready to serve the other?  
Because I'm not one of those

What if I'm not a whole person?  
What if I'm missing bits?  
Always making mistakes  
Hurting the people I love  
Avoiding dealing with the difficult stuff

What if not being whole means I am a real person rather than a figment of my or someone else's imagination?

What if not being whole means I can confess my mistakes and receive forgiveness?

I think I like that idea

*We bring our private confessions to God in the silence...*

Receive the good news:

God's steadfast love endures forever!

While we were yet sinners, God made a way for us to return to God and to return to one another.

By God's grace, we are a forgiven and reconciled people.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

## The Peace

## Notices

### Reading                    1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

## Reflection

You are likely all familiar with the saying, 'He is so heavenly minded, he's no earthly use.' It speaks to a tendency by some people to be so focussed on being, 'good Christians,' I use the term advisedly, that they forget that living happens in the real world. I don't mean that being faithful is not real. I mean that things like looking after our physical wants and needs are not only valuable, they are essential. Even a person focussed on prayer and

reading their Bible needs to pause to eat and sleep and go to the toilet occasionally.

From being heavenly minded it is only a short movement to looking down on people who aren't as focussed on the spiritual. You don't pray enough. You don't read your Bible enough. You don't believe enough. That is why you are sick or hungry or in debt. You are not being blessed by God because you aren't spiritual enough.

Of course, it doesn't stop there. The conversation will often move to asking if you have been filled with the Spirit, do you speak in tongues, have you been baptised by full immersion. And you need to make sure that you only congregate with the right people, that is, with people who believe the same things we do. From there, another short step to becoming a cult.

I suspect most of us have seen it happen. It is often, though not always, young people who get caught up in the enthusiasm of their faith. Enthusiasm, of itself, is not a bad thing. It can drive action and see things being achieved. With the support of wisdom and careful encouragement it is the sort of thing that can change the world. Left to itself, though, it can become a dangerous driver of unhelpful behaviour.

I think this is why it is so important to be well informed. To be aware of the world around us and to think about the implications, not only of our own actions, but those with whom we surround ourselves. By reading widely and thinking deeply we can sometimes avoid the trap of thinking we know what is right. For my money, this is the trap that Christians fall into more easily than I would like. I read a verse in the Bible so it must be so. Only you can't just read a verse and take it for granted that you know what it means.

It reminds me of the old joke about the man seeking inspiration from God. So he closed his eyes, let his Bible fall open and speared the page with his finger. Looking down he read the words from Matthew 27:5, 'Judas went and hanged himself.' Thinking to himself that this didn't seem right he tried again and this time when he opened his eyes he read from Luke 10:37, 'Go and do likewise.'

It is funny in its way, but I have known people who have operated like this. Some of you will be aware that our reading today is often used to support the idea of the rapture – a late 17th century idea that came and went for some time before being taken up and given wings as it were by Tim LaHaye

and Jerry Jenkins in the Left Behind series of books. The problem with the rapture is that it is not supported by a careful reading of the whole Bible, and is not even supported by these particular verses. It is an idea that has been used to keep people with the narrow boundaries of a particular belief system. One could even argue that it is like a cult in how it operates.

I do not believe that is how Jesus expects us to behave or how we should read the Bible. I often like to remind people that God gave us a brain for a reason and that is not to blindly follow whatever the meme of the moment might be saying. We need to read our Bibles. We need to learn about what is happening in the world around us. We need to observe how people are living and dying around us. We need to know our history and geography and economics and sciences and politics. We need to discuss it all with fellow Christians, those we agree with and those we don't. Then we take all of these things and ask God what we need to understand from what we have learned. Then, maybe, just maybe, we will not be uninformed, whether that is about those who have died or for anything else we might care about.

This is what I am referring to when I say that Creating is Grounded. We become grounded by anchoring our faith in God and educating our faith with every sense and ability God has given us. It is not easy. There is plenty in the world we don't and likely will never understand. And we keep working at it because it is when we delve deeply into all that God has given us and shown us we grow in our faith. Then as we grow in faith, our roots dig into the soil of mercy and we begin to bear fruit.

## Cornerstone

*Edward Mote, Eric Liljero, Jonas Myrin, Reuben Morgan*

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust in Jesus' name

Christ alone, Cornerstone  
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love  
Through the storm He is Lord  
Lord of all

When darkness seems to hide His face  
I rest on His unchanging grace  
In every high and stormy gale

My anchor holds within the veil  
My anchor holds within the veil

When he shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless stand before the throne

### Reading [Matthew 25:1-13](#)

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

### Reflection

This reading is a wonderful illustration of the practical outworking of being grounded in our faith. I have to confess that I have often struggled with this reading. When I read it, I feel like there is a lack of grace, that the five ‘wise’ bridesmaids and the bridegroom were unnecessarily harsh and unkind. I realise that part of this is because I don’t understand the culture that made sense of Jesus’ story. This, certainly, is a part of being informed. Having said that, beside the fact that wedding traditions in ancient Israel were a very important part of village life we know very little.

So the next step might be to try to get a grip on the apparent intent of the story. Jesus is given the words, ‘Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.’ The sharp listeners among you will notice the contrast between this statement and the fact that both the foolish *and* the wise fell asleep. So keeping awake in that sense is obviously not the point.

In fact, the only difference we can see between the wise and the foolish virgins is the problem of the oil.

I have been fascinated as I have researched this message at the incredible range of interpretations that have been applied to the wise and the foolish virgins. Layer upon layer of assumed behaviours and appearances, none of which are even hinted at by the story. Instead, cultural assumptions have been laid on the story to add spice to what is otherwise a rather strange, even boring series of events.

Back to the oil. The caution every commentator makes is that we must be prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom, whose exact timing no-one can identify. But what if the bridegroom had been a couple of hours later? Would the wise virgins have run out of oil as well? Why couldn't they simply share the oil? After all, Jesus is constantly telling his listeners that they should share what they have. Is there something here we are not seeing? Or is it so simple we overlook it?

All of which brings me back to being grounded in our faith. How might we understand what is going on from our context? How can we take this story and make sense of it in the world we live in today?

I would like to suggest that the arrival of the bridegroom is almost peripheral to the understanding of the story. The real question isn't, 'When will the bridegroom turn up?' It is, 'How am I behaving now?' The truth of the matter is that you can never be fully prepared for an event for which you will have no warning. Even the most diligent prepper, having dug their hideout, filled it with supplies and got it ready for the end of the world, still needs to continue to live in the meantime. They need to earn money, maintain relationships with people who matter to them, adjust as technologies change and allow for inconveniences such as climate changes.

For us as slightly more 'normal' people our task is all about living well. It is about building healthy relationships with the people around us. It is about continuing to grow our relationship with God. It is about listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit so we can respond to our context with wisdom and care. The oil we have to attend to is not some kind of future resource that might run out if we don't have enough. The oil is not being so heavenly minded we are no earthly use. It is the exact opposite. It is taking the circumstances we find ourselves in and figuring out how to be the

blessing we are made to be. That could be a whole series of simple things. Greeting a friend, preparing a meal, reading a story to a child. It could be more complex. Sitting on a committee, planning an event, running a project. Whatever the task in before us we press into it with the awareness that we are surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses. Not watching to judge us, but to cheer us on, encouraging us to work out our faith wherever, whenever, and however we find ourselves. Then we will be attending to the oil in our lamps.

This, I think, is the essence of being grounded. In finding the presence of God wherever and whenever we are we can respond with faith and offer hope and Good News to those around us.

### We Pray

God who fills us with talents and abilities, both loud and spectacular, and quiet and retiring, we thank you for your gifts to us. We are often afraid to step out of our small, self-imposed fences to allow your gifts to flourish in our lives. Instead, the oil that is the blessing you have given us to bless others withers away, unused and unappreciated. Help us to ground our faith and our actions in you, allowing your Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and mediate our encounters with others so that we will be ready when Jesus returns. Through Jesus, who acted in faith to the benefit of those around him, we pray. Amen.

### Only You

*Andy Park*

No one but You Lord  
Can satisfy this longing in my heart  
Nothing I do Lord  
Can take the place of drawing near to You

Only You can fill my deepest longing  
Only You can breathe in me new life  
Only You can fill my heart with laughter  
Only You can answer my heart's cry

Father I love You  
Come satisfy the longing in my heart  
Fill me overwhelm me  
Until I know Your love deep in my heart



## Offering

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

Holy Shepherd of all generations, we bring our gifts this morning with thanksgiving and praise! We present these tithes and offerings not from hearts of obligation or debt, but with the confidence and joy that through your love made incarnate in your son Jesus, you've forever removed our debt. Our joy and gratitude are hard to contain. Use our gifts and our lives to do your work of compassion, mercy, and redemption. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Stef Jeschke

God,  
we lay our world at your heart,  
the small world that we traverse with our steps,  
and the big world, of which we know little more than the names  
that make the headlines.

We pray for people  
who do their work day after day  
or look for work day after day,  
for all those who care for others,  
in many different ways  
for people who share joys and sorrows.

We pray for people who have to bear heavy burdens:  
the sick and the injured  
the shaken and the displaced,

for all those who suffer hunger and need.

We pray for people in politics, in business, in key positions  
that they will use their power for peace and justice.

We pray for our church community,  
for all those who support and help to shape it.

We pray for the community of all Christians, that they approach each other  
openly and fulfil their responsibility for the world.

We pray for all people, that they will fulfil their shared  
responsibility.

We pray for all the people we have forgotten.

In silence, we tell you our personal concerns: ...

Thank you for allowing us to bring all this to you.

God,

hear our prayer and transform it into blessing.

Through Jesus who taught us how to pray...

**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**

## The Church's one foundation

*S J Stone*

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is his new creation by water and the Word.

From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;

With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth;

Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;

One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,

And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,

She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;

Till, with the vision glorious, her longing eyes are blest,

And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,

And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.

O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we

Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

## Benediction and Grace

And so, as we go on from here may we find the solid ground of our faith in God firm beneath our feet as we live out the blessing we are made to be...

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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