

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Aware

19 November 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 123

To you I lift up my eyes,

O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,

As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,

So our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.

Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,

For we have had more than enough of contempt.

Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease,

Of the contempt of the proud.

All things bright and beautiful

Cecil Frances Alexander

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful:

The Lord God made them all.

Each little flow'r that opens,

Each little bird that sings,

He made their glowing colours,

He made their tiny wings.

The purple-headed mountains,

The river running by,

The sunset and the morning

That brightens up the sky.

He gave us eyes to see them,

And lips that we might tell

How great is God Almighty,

Who has made all things well.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession – Stef Jeschke

I am grateful

- for the trousers that are a little tight because that means I have enough to eat
- for the mess after a party that I clean up because that means I was surrounded by loved ones
- for the lawn that gets mowed and the windows that get cleaned because that means I have a home

I am grateful

- for the loudly voiced complaints about the government, because that means we live in a free country and have the right to free speech
- for the parking space, at the very back of the car park, because that means I can afford a car
- for the person sitting behind me in church who sings off-key because that means I can hear well

I am grateful

- for the laundry and the ironing mountain, because that means I have enough clothes
- for tiredness and aching muscles at the end of the day, because that means I am healthy and able to work hard
- for the alarm clock that rings in the morning, because that means I had a good night's sleep and I will be given a new, peaceful day!

Thank you for giving me and us all this every day.

It cannot be taken for granted.

Wonderful God,

sometimes it's worth changing our perspective.

To be grateful for what is given to me and to us.

To be grateful that we ourselves can be a blessing for other people.

So we ask you, (especially with a view to the coming winter in the northern hemisphere and the Advent and Christmas season) for all people who do not have these things.

- who are hungry, thirsty
- are cold, homeless
- threatened by war
- suffer from pain

- have lost family and friends
- who have been forgotten.

We ask you for all people

- who help, listen,
- take responsibility,
- are there for others
- and give them hope, joy and courage.

Let us all be a blessing to one another. This is what we ask of you. Amen

The Peace

Notices

Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Reflection

I find it fascinating watching people when they are travelling. It is absolutely a generalisation, but here are some of the things I have noticed about different cultures.

East Asian cultures – Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, are only interested in their destination. They will get in a vehicle and promptly fall asleep until they arrive wherever they are headed. Once there they will march around

the area, ensuring everything has been seen and photographed before getting on their transport to fall asleep again.

Americans seem to travel in order to compare themselves with what they are observing. Is it tall, theirs is taller, is it old, theirs is older, is it sweet, theirs is sweeter. They tend to be loud and frequently obnoxious if they don't get exactly what they want, when they want it.

Europeans are curious but very sure they can do it better. Always polite they will point out how their culture is more advanced and their education so much better than ours. They will always speak kindly in English, but if you can parse their language you will often hear them being quite rude about the 'natives.' I'm not referring to Māori here, but New Zealanders in general.

I'm totally generalising and I have met many people who don't fit my carefully aimed stereotypes. What I have noticed in most travellers, no matter where they are from, is that they are often unaware of what is happening around them. They are so focussed on the particular thing they are looking at that you could set a bomb off behind them and many wouldn't even notice. Just quietly, I know some Kiwis like that too.

A much-travelled friend of mine once told me that he could nearly always tell the Kiwis in a crowd, no matter where he was in the world, because they were aware of their environment. They were looking around, conscious of the people and what they were doing, thinking about their surroundings and where everything fits. Again, a total stereotype, but one I kind of like.

So, what does it mean to be aware of our environment? There are a few things to it. Some things are a little like what you see at the beginning of a flight ensuring we know what to do and when. (video). Other aspects of being aware can include watching for the mood of people around us, listening for how people are feeling, how they are moving and responding to anything that is happening. I have watched preachers blissfully unaware that their audience is bored out of their minds. I have watched song leaders pounding away at a song long after everyone just wants to sit down. (I hope I don't do that too often). I have been in a crowd when it is clear something is not quite right, but people just keep on going. That is a scary place to be.

Here in 1 Thessalonians, we find Paul encouraging the people to be aware of their environment. We talked about this a little last week and about how the point isn't to be literally awake all the time. It is about living well and making the most of the opportunities before us. Sometimes that means to sleep when we are tired. It also means to actively look for ways we can be the best we can be in our space.

Notice that I'm not suggesting that we all need to leap into action and make things happen. Some people can't do that. Their eyesight is failing. Their legs are failing. It's hard work to get out of bed in the morning. That doesn't mean they no longer have anything to offer. I speak for myself that I am frequently encouraged to keep pressing into God by those of you who can no longer rush around like crazy puppies doing anything and everything in front of you. You share deep insights into life and faith that only long life can bring. I value those things very much.

Being aware is not about doing. It is about being. God has comparatively little interest in what you can do and far more interest in connecting with you, being in relationship with you. Being with God allows you to be more aware of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. Being with God enables you to discern what is happening around you. Rather than rushing from one excitement to another, leaping from the latest hot topic to the next, we become aware of the deep things of God. We hear the gentle whisper as God calls our name. In this way we remain awake and sober, wearing the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation. Then we will not be surprised when God moves among us.

God of Wonders

Chris Tomlin

Lord of all creation, of water, earth, and sky

The heavens are Your tabernacle

Glory to the Lord on High

God of wonders beyond our galaxy

You are holy, holy

The universe declares Your majesty

You are holy, holy

Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of heaven and earth

Early in the morning
I will celebrate the light
And as I stumble through the darkness
I will call Your name by night

Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth

Reading [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Reflection

Life is not fair. It doesn't matter what we do or how we do it, life is not fair. Some people seem to get vastly more than others. Some work hard and gain little while others do little and are given lots. It doesn't even seem to have all that much to do with talent. Some of the most talented people in the world are paid a pittance when compared with their much less talented bosses and managers. On a different level, one person struggles to make ends meet for much of their lives and then suddenly, when it doesn't matter nearly as much, they have enough to live comfortably. Meanwhile, as they settle into relaxing into their hard-earned retirement young families at the other end are struggling to make ends meet. How is that fair?

I've always felt sorry for the slave with one talent. After all, the owner didn't lose anything out the other end and received back the one talent as he had given it. Granted, putting the money in the bank would have been more productive than putting it in a hole in the ground. But to be called worthless and thrown into outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth seems rather ridiculous.

Of course, using hyperbole to make a point was an ancient practice, even 2000 years ago. So, we can put the weeping and gnashing of teeth to one side for a moment and pause to ponder what we can gain from the story. What is Jesus attempting to get his listeners to understand here?

Let's leave aside the punishments for a moment and listen for what else is going on. In fact, let's leave the talents out of the mix as well. What is happening here?

The master is going on a journey and leaves his slaves to look after his things.

Some of the slaves get out there and create opportunities. They make the most of their time and grow and develop along the way. I'm going to let my imagination run free. Maybe one of them starts by running a bake sale. Turns out people like their cooking, so they keep developing their ideas and soon it is a thriving business. There are some failures along the way. One of the accountants steals some money. A mall development goes wildly over budget. A range of children's cakes doesn't sell. But overall things are happening.

In the meantime, another slave is experimenting with new ways of bringing entertainment to people. A travelling group of artists and musicians is gathered, and venues hired to enable people to attend shows. People can move around and interact with the art and the artists. Joining in with a dance, painting on canvasses, singing along with the vocalists. It takes a while to catch on but begins to gather a devoted following and becomes a gateway for people to discover their own abilities and interests.

Another slave is unsure exactly what they can do but decide that they are quite good at listening to people. They set up a small booth and offer to listen to people. No advice offered, no promises made, only that you will be guaranteed 30 minutes of uninterrupted listening to whatever you want to talk about. To their surprise there is an instant queue of people wanting to talk. They talk about all sorts of things. Their work, their hopes, their dreams, their marriages, their families, their fears. It seems that people just want someone to listen. Some of it makes a great story. Some of it is dark and even hateful. Some of it makes the slave want to skip and some to hide. Each person leaves the booth with a lighter step.

One slave does no exploring. Does nothing new. Does nothing at all beyond merely existing. After all, nothing ventured, no mistakes to be made. They retreat from the world shutting out all possibility of success or failure. Life, they tell themselves, is about getting from one end to the other with the least possible problems. The less said, the less done, the less problems.

Eventually the master returns. He is glad and rejoices with the slaves who have discovered new possibilities and created new opportunities. He is disappointed and sad for the slave who has missed the opportunity to become more.

The master's absence had been an opportunity for the slaves to become more aware of who they were and what they could create. Sadly, one of the slaves created nothing and, in many ways, became less as a result. As for the others, we can be 100% certain they didn't get everything right. There would have been mistakes along the way. The real key to the story is that they were using every opportunity to learn and grow and become more. They weren't simply creating stuff for other people; they were creating within themselves. They were creating joy and hope and confidence and courage as they explored the possibilities before them. They were creating resilience and strength and discipline as they dealt with their mistakes.

So, I guess I no longer feel sorry for the slave with one talent in the way I used to. I don't think it was the master who was being harsh. I think the slave had dealt poorly with himself and the consequences were self-inflicted. He was not aware of what was happening on the inside and it cost him dearly.

I want to encourage you today. Become more aware of the wonderful person God has made you to be. Invest in that person. Learn and grow and become more. Create for others all while knowing that you are creating for yourself at the same time. Most of all, gather it all to God and listen deeply for the Spirit as God moves among us.

We Pray

God. We name you as one who sees everything, hears everything, knows everything. You are aware of us, more than aware, you know the hairs on our heads, the thoughts of our hearts, the intentions of our minds. All too often we are deeply unaware, not noticing those around us, let alone your work beside us, before us and within us. Gift us insight to see you, to hear you, to experience you. Move us from being deeply unaware to being deeply aware. Move us to create joy and hope and confidence and courage and resilience and strength and discipline as we listen for you and to ourselves. Through Jesus, who listened deeply to your Spirit, we pray. Amen.

The God Who Stays

Matthew West

If I were You

I would've given up on me by now
I would've labelled me a lost cause
'Cause I feel just like a lost cause

If I were You

I would've turned around and walked away
I would've labelled me beyond repair
'Cause I feel like I'm beyond repair

Oh but somehow

You don't see me like I do
Somehow You're still here

You're the God who stays
You're the God who stays
You're the One who runs in my direction
When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands
With wide open arms
And You tell me nothing I have ever done
Can separate my heart from the God who stays

I used to hide
Every time I thought I let You down
I always thought I had to earn my way
But I'm learning You don't work that way

My shame can't separate
My guilt can't separate
My past can't separate
I'm Yours forever

My sin can't separate
My scars can't separate
My failures can't separate
I'm Yours forever

No enemy can separate
No power of hell can take away
Your love for me will never change
I'm Yours forever

Offering

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

Lord of peace and serenity, receive the gifts we bring this day as we present them in thankfulness and joy. We bring ourselves as our offering, that in living lives of truth, justice, honour, and excellence, we might please you and be worthy of your never-failing love and presence with us. Grateful that Christ and the Holy Spirit might dwell in us, we pray in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the people, men women and children around the world who have limited access to resources like books and the internet, who have few opportunities to hear the Good News.

Make your ways known upon earth, O God,

your saving power among all peoples.

For your people struggling to understand our place in this rapidly changing world. Gift us insight into how we can live for you.

Renew your Church in holiness,

and help us to serve you with joy.

For those attempting to form a stable government for our nation. For the leaders of nations doing their best to serve their people.

Guide the leaders of this and every nation,

that justice may prevail throughout the world.

For the multitudes, here in Oamaru, spread through our nation, spread across the world who do not have access to a safe place to sleep, a reliable food supply, even friends they can rely upon.

Let not the needy, O God, be forgotten,

nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

For ourselves as we seek to create joy and hope and confidence and courage and resilience and strength and discipline within ourselves and for those we live among.

Make us instruments of your peace,

and let your glory be over all the earth.

All these things we pray through Christ 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 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

Praise my soul

Henry Francis Lyte

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour
to his people in distress.
Praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!

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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