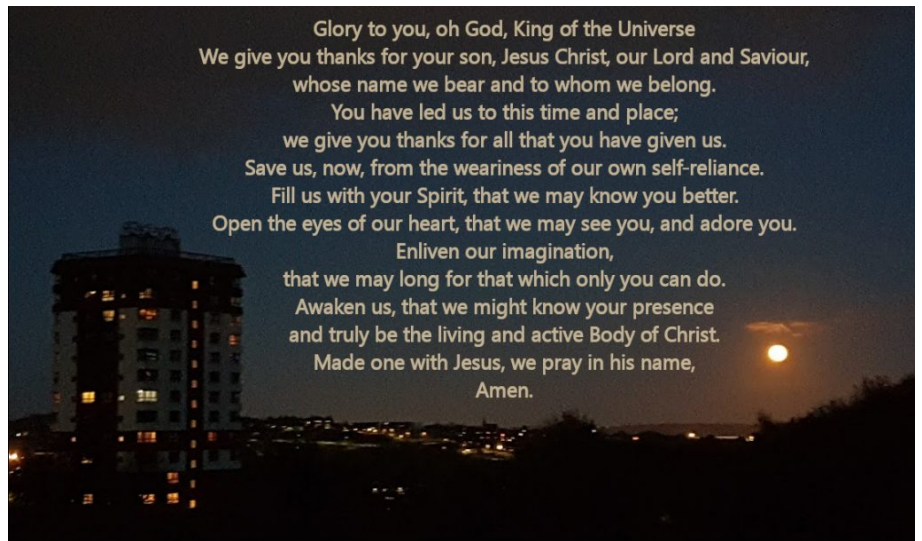


# A Prayer For Our Church

Last week I was at a conference where the following words were used to describe our current circumstance:



**Volatility**  
**Uncertainty**  
**Complexity**  
**Ambiguity**

I won't unpack those words here; they speak for themselves. They certainly describe something of what it's like to be working, living, and breathing within the context of a parish church (as well as more widely). The normal means and methods of planning and strategising are being lashed by this perfect storm.

And that's OK.

In fact, in so many ways, these are the exact circumstances in which the church of God should revel and excel. This is not because we are more stable, certain, simple, and clear than any other part of society, but because the gospel we cling to speaks of a God who is! He is a rock and a refuge. Lo, he is with us always, to the very end of the age. Including in the storms.

In the light of this, I have been struck, recently, by how St. Paul prayed for his churches in the midst of their own

volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous days. He didn't pray, first and foremost, for a change in their circumstances; he prayed for an opening of their eyes to see and *know* the one who is *with* them in all things.

<sup>16</sup> *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*  
*Ephesians 1:16-19a*

This is my prayer for the church, also.

<sup>9</sup> *...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*  
*Colossians 1:9-12*

We have so much. We have theological and teaching resources. We have freedom to worship, and people to proclaim the word of life. We have resources of time and money. We have the necessary institutional frameworks. We absolutely have the

*opportunities* to serve, care, and speak of the way of Christ. We might pray for more of these things, but we have them already.

Our plate is full, so to speak. What we *need* is a desire to eat and drink of that which has been given to us. This is eucharistic mystery: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood; has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54). We are happy to arrange the room, set the table, even welcome and serve the dinner guests; we have planning meetings and strategy documents and even some slick slideshows to prove it! We would do it all, but one thing we lack: to sit down and *eat and drink* of Jesus himself.

Oh that we would behold him. See him. Know him better. Yearn for him. Long for him. That we would be in *orbit* around him and have *confidence* that when he is known, and followed, as the Way, Truth, and Life, then – and *only then* – will the life-filled kingdom of God be on earth as it is in heaven.

So “open the eyes of our heart”, Lord! Just as Paul prayed long ago. Give us the Spirit by which we may see you and *know* you. *Enlighten* us with a revelation of how you are with us, and call us, and shape us, and change us, and move us. *Awaken* us, Lord, to the truth of who you are. *Enliven* us that we might overflow with the marks of the one to whom we belong. The rest of it will come from that. Without that, the rest of it is wearying and ultimately worthless; and I think we know that in our hungry spiritual bellies.

To that end, I’ve written a prayer for the church communities to which I belong. It’s not particularly precise or poetic, but I wonder if you might join me in praying it with me each day as we head quickly towards advent, the season in which we wait for the Lord. We *will* wait for the Lord.

**Glory to you, oh God, King of the Universe**

**We give you thanks for your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and**

Saviour,  
whose name we bear and to whom we belong.  
You have led us to this time and place;  
we give you thanks for all that you have given us.  
Save us, now, from the weariness of our own self-reliance.  
Fill us with your Spirit, that we may know you better.  
Open the eyes of our heart, that we may see you, and adore  
you.  
Enliven our imagination, that we may long for that which only  
you can do.  
Awaken us, that we might know your presence  
and truly be the living and active Body of Christ.  
Made one with Jesus, we pray in his name,  
Amen.

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# Mercy in the Watches of the Night

Why haven't I come across this song before?  
It's from 2006.



But what simple, eloquent, words of falling at the feet of the  
Father.

His characteristics personified. Majesty and grace, holiness  
and mercy. Tears.

*Am I unfit for You*

*Remember me, the one who turned from You*

*I come in rags tattered by the Fall  
And all the earth, a witness to my crime*

*Mercy, weep over me  
Let Your tears wash me clean  
Majesty, be merciful with me  
For my eyes have seen Holy*

*Hear my prayer at night  
Let the morning find me alive  
For I am tired and weakened by the Fall  
Let all the earth bear witness to my cry*

*Let the Amen sound from Heaven as You lift my soul  
Let the Amen sound from Heaven as You lift my soul  
Let the Angels sound from Heaven, Holy is the Lord]*

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## **Q&A: What does it mean to be co-heirs with Christ?**

**Sarah asks:**

*Hi Will,*

*What does it mean to be co-heirs with Christ in Romans 8:17?*

*It must be unfathomable, outrageous grace to inherit all that Christ has as God the Son!*

*This is way better than Eden isn't it?*

*What does being co-heirs with Jesus look like expressed in our relationship with him for eternity – how does it fit in with us being the worshippers and him being worshipped? I suppose I mean what does it mean to be alongside God as heirs but being glorified humans, not divine?*

**[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]**

Thanks Sarah,



The passage you are quoting is (to use the NIV) Romans 8:14-17:

*14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 **Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

To respond to your first two points. Yes, this is “unfathomable, outrageous grace” and yes, “this is way better than Eden”!

You ask what does it *mean*?

Firstly, we need to grasp what Christ’s inheritance *is*. The answer is big and simple: Christ’s inheritance is *everything*.

It isn't always spelled out; after all, how do you detail everything? What might it include? *Big things*, like "eternal life", the "new heaven and the new earth", and "peace." It's *everything*.

The go-to passage that helps us out is Hebrews 1:1-2

*1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed **heir of all things**, and through whom also he made the universe.*

You might also be familiar with the "attitude of Christ" that Paul espouses in Philippians 2:1-11. This passage talks about the "self-emptying" (the technical term is *kenosis*) of Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Paul then talks about Christ's *exaltation*, and in many ways he is talking about Christ's *inheritance* – what God the Father *rightly* gives the Son who gave himself up for his people:

*9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Christ's inheritance is the *reverse kenosis*, that comes not from himself, but from his Father.

And it's not just every *thing*, it is also *all authority*. Just

look at Matthew 28:18 or 1 Corinthians 15:24 and many other places. Jesus really *is* the “Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6).

That’s his inheritance. Of which we are *co-heirs*.

That’s amazing.

We can pull it apart theologically, but the narrative is simple: The heart of God has always been to share the fullness of himself with his people. We see it in Eden. We see it as he reaches out to Abram, making his promises, intervening in history. We see it as his presence goes with his people out of Egypt, through the sea, and on into the wilderness years. We see it as he speaks through his prophets. We see it as he nurtures a king whose heart is after his own. We see it as he pours himself out as a child, and in sharing our humanity, *covers us* with his grace and his purpose. He now shares with us his sonship, his sweet heart of faith, his trust and dependence, his obedience even to the point of death, and the blessings that rightly flow from it.

We are “in Christ” as he covers us, and Christ is “in us” by his Spirit. Salvation catches us up into the relational dynamics of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thinking of salvation without any sense of sharing in Christ’s inheritance, is like conceiving of a banquet without any reference to food; you can sort of imagine something in the abstract, but it doesn’t really make any sense.

But your secondary question draws the meaning out even more. You ask, “*What does being co-heirs with Jesus look like expressed in our relationship with him for eternity – how does it fit in with us being the worshippers and him being worshipped?*”

I think there’s something here: God *is* a worshipper. The object of God’s worship is himself. This is not vanity, it is truthful *delight* and entirely appropriate. The



Father *adores* the Son. The Son is *devoted* to the Father. The Spirit *raises up* the name of God! Surely we can say that Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, rightly *worships* his Father, perfectly, throughout his life and especially in his death.

To be co-heirs with Christ is, therefore, to share in his role as a worshipper. In Christ, we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and, in Christ, it is worthy and honourable and *received* in great delight by Almighty Creator God.

Again, there's something amazing about that.

But does our inheritance with Christ also mean an inheritance in the worship he *receives*? In some sense, yes, but I mean this very carefully: as Christ's people, we share in the worship *he* receives, not in any worship we receive, but in the worship *he* receives.

What I'm trying to grasp is in this account from the end of the book, in Revelation 21:9-27:

*9 One of the seven angels... came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

John then goes on to talk about the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem and includes imagery of apostolic foundations and things like that. The overall picture is one of beauty, and purity, of the Bride of Christ, who shines (and this is the point) *with the glory of God*. Jesus covers his bride with *his* glory. *That* is our inheritance. It is not *our* glory. It is *his*. But we share in it. All creation will gaze upon us, his people, and worship him.

And that brings us back to Romans 8:17, where we started, because there it is in the second part of the verse:

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we **may also share in his glory.***

It is outrageously amazing.

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## Side-by-side in the Minefields

In the light of yesterday's post it seemed appropriate to repost this video:

Gill discovered this song on our 15th anniversary. We were 19 and 21 the year we got engaged...

We're hoping to see Andrew performing in the UK later this year.

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## Deep Joy

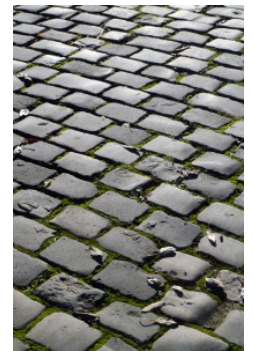
I'm currently reflecting on suffering as an essential, unavoidable part of what it means to live and follow Jesus.

This song by Page CXVI renders it one of the most profound ways that I've seen and heard.

Now, how to express it in dry, non-musical, words...

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# Sustenance for the Plodding Pedestrian



*When You don't move the mountains I'm needing You to move  
When You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through  
When You don't give the answers as I cry out to You  
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!*

*Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings  
There's not a day ahead You have not seen  
So, in all things be my life and breath  
I want what You want Lord and nothing less*

---

# Something anthemic

Rend Collective have released their new album, *As Family We Go*. Here's the introductory video.

It's rare that I come across something that is so anthemic to the way Gill and I seek to lead life.

*We as a church were never meant to be a timid club huddled together for safety, but a pilgrim family progress, chasing after the wild lion heart of God...*

*We weren't created to journey through life alone, but we're called "the family of God" for a reason...*

*We've got to break out of the cages of safety and fear into the wide open spaces of the unknown trusting that nothing is impossible with God...*

*We were never intended to go this road alone, we were given to each other as family, and as family we go.*

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## Missional Eschatology Before Breakfast

There are these words:



*Fearless warriors in a picket fence,  
reckless abandon wrapped in common sense  
Deep water faith in the shallow end  
and we are caught in the middle  
With eyes wide open to the differences,  
the God we want and the God who is  
But will we trade our dreams for His  
or are we caught in the middle?*

*Somewhere between my heart and my hands,  
Somewhere between my faith and my plans,  
Somewhere between the safety of the boat and the crashing  
waves...*

That things are both “now and not yet” is a fundamental part of Christian spirituality.

It locates us in history: The Kingdom of God is **now**, for Christ is Risen! The Kingdom of God is **not yet**, for we look ahead to when Christ brings renewal and rightness to the groaning of all creation. We are “in the middle” in the opportunity to share in God’s loving purposes, his *mission*. We are not too early nor too late to the dynamic plans of God. This is what *eschatology* and talk about the end of all things means for the Christian.

It locates us in ourselves: “**Now** we are children of God, but what we will be has **not yet** been made known.” (1 John 3:2). In the middle, we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Phil 2:12-13). We know now, whose we are, for certain. But we are incomplete, and we must have growth, refinement, maturation, strengthening.

“Now and not yet” therefore both *grounds us* and *stretches us*.

- We delight in what we have, but holy discontent with ourselves and the world spurs us on.

- We rejoice in where we have come to, but plans and ambitions must be abandoned as shallow and small as God's perspective invades.
- We have the peace of present rest, but the constant call makes us face our fears and turn away from the control and comfort that would placate them: "Your journey is not yet done, continue, walk this way with me."

The opposite of "now and not yet" is terrible. It's "this is all there ever was, and it's all there ever will be." In such things we are both rootless and directionless, simply adrift. Rather, lead me through the tensions and pains of the now and not yet, so that, being alive, I may live!

Photo Credit: "Fresh-muesli" by Markus Kuhn at en.wikipedia – Transferred from en.wikipedia. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

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## Immanent Divinity on the Coffee Corner

Faith is both affective and cognitive.

Which is to say that we not only know about God, but we know him and are known by him. He *moves* us. He is close. He is immanent. Even (and especially) at those times when we are simply drinking coffee in the morning.



I need to remember this. Because often I need to be moved, changed, shifted in perspective and focus – away from my own navel, and the things that would bind, and towards the God of

love. And then I can move, and bless, and do those life-giving things. Because of him.

*When you move, you move all our fears  
When you move, you move us to tears...*

*Because when you speak, when you move.  
When you do what only you can do  
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek*

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## Conquering for the Commuter

A moment of reflection from this morning's drive while listening to Christy Nockels' *Healing is In Your Hands*:

Amongst the lyrics are echoes of Romans 8:35-39

*No mountain, no valley  
No gain or loss we know  
Could keep us from Your love*

*No sickness, no secret  
No chain is strong enough  
To keep us from Your love...*

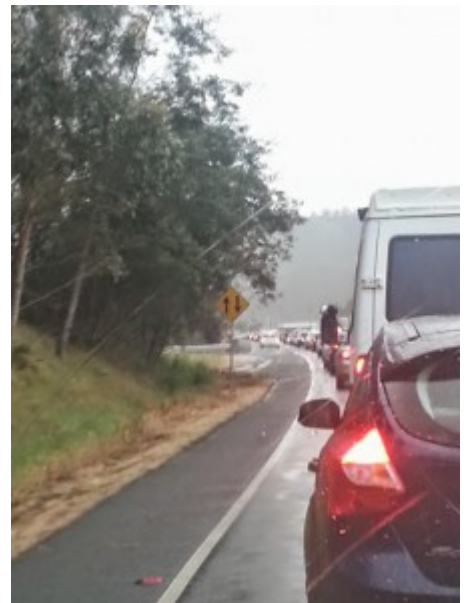
*In all things we know that  
We are more than conquerors  
You keep us by Your love*

Romans 8:35-39 reads:

*35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)*

It's a passage that I know well. It's one of my favourites and has been a source of comfort for me when the emotions of the day feel like alone-ness, anxiety, or even abandonment.



The phrase that struck me today is this: **"We are more than conquerors."**

It's one of those phrases that has what I call "teleological significance." It speaks to our *purpose*, our ambition, our direction, our goal. There's two facets to this:

The first recognises that what we observe in and around us in the world is a form of *conquering*. I see Islamic extremists beheading Christians; they are trying to *conquer* the world with their expression of Islam. I see areas of my own



society, the Western World, which is blindly slipping into intolerant impositions that gives little value to freedom of conscience; it's another form of attempted conquering. It has ever been the way of the world. This should not surprise us.

The natural response is fear. What does the future look like? Will I and my children and my children's children be safe? To be safe, we look to *win*. We *fight* back. We use the same sword as what we perceive is against us: we spin and tear down, we demolish people as well as ideas, we demonise, we hound, we yell; we try to conquer.

The second facet recognises the reality: we are more than conquerors. And our safety and security rests not on the ways and woes of what is around us, but upon the love of God in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is not headed by a weakened or sin-wracked king, but by the one who has conquered even death. The foundation of our ultimate citizenship is sure, as is the certainty of it's future. God is the God of history, do you think he has abandoned this part of it?

And on that basis we face the conquering hordes (whoever or whatever they might be), not with fear, but in love-filled confidence. We speak and act on truth with our confidence not in ourselves, but in the love of God. We apply ourselves to *his* purpose. We *invest ourselves* in *his* loving works. We seek to capture every thought that's floating through the social conscience and reimagine it in the light of the fact that God is actually real, and Jesus has actually risen and inaugurated the life of a renewed world. *He* is so much more than any pretentious conqueror. And we rest and work and have our being in *him*.