

Opoho Psalms

The First Two Years



Psalm Writing Group
Opoho Presbyterian Church

For Margaret

with thanks

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!

Psalm 96:1

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Psalm Writing at Opoho Church

A small group of us at Opoho Presbyterian Church meets every couple of months to encourage each other writing psalms. We eat our evening meal of takeaways together before sharing psalms we've written since we last met. We each read our psalms aloud and receive encouragement and useful feedback from the group. It has been surprisingly fruitful and enjoyable.

Our psalm writing grew out of our Bible study where we are on a 6½ year quest to read the Bible, one book a month from Genesis to Revelation. When we discussed the book of Psalms in 2017 we thought it might be interesting to write responses to particular Biblical psalms or even try and write our own psalms ~ hence this group was born. Candi joined us later after we advertised the group to other Dunedin Presbyterian churches and the North End churches.

Since we began writing psalms in the winter of 2017 we've been asked from time to time, "What is a psalm? How are they different to poems?" People typically think of psalms as meaning only sacred songs, and those in the Biblical book of Psalms in particular. We don't see the term psalm as being limited to the Biblical psalms written 2,500 years ago ~ we believe anyone can write psalms about their relationship with God and Jesus, and their understandings of spiritual matters within our faith context.

Psalms are personal expressions of belief – although they can be used corporately – and, like songs, they use poetic devices. We write in our own language(s) and they are very much grounded in the time, places and situations we find ourselves in. They may be lament, praise, story, testimony, confession, thanksgiving, exploration, history, liturgy, prayer, song, wisdom or more.

Our approaches, topics, styles and psalms are very diverse, all of which adds to the richness of our experience. Sometimes we find we have chosen to write about the same topic, such as Advent or the Christchurch Mosque Massacre. One of us sometimes writes psalms in response to issues in their workplace while another challenges herself to write a psalm each week during Lent. We have found writing psalms can be a useful, and productive, way of processing issues that concern us. And, as one of us has said, "It makes you view the world differently through a psalm-like gaze".

The massacre at the mosque in Christchurch in March 2019 shocked New Zealanders deeply. Members of the Group spontaneously put their thoughts about the massacre into psalms with far-reaching effect. Margaret's *Psalm of Despair and a Call for Help*, written while in lockdown in Christchurch on the afternoon of the massacre, was put on the church Facebook page and has since had over 3,000 hits; Tui's *Hospitality of Abraham* is on the *Tui Motu* website; Andrew's *Psalm against Amalek* reached the Prime Minister's office; and Candi's *Psalm on March 15* evolved from a prayer of intercession she offered at her church a week after the massacre.

We were shocked by the *Review of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership and the Presbyterian Research Centre, Pre-Change Proposal* (29 January 2019), and our group wrote a psalm in response. *Psalm of Lament and Petition* became part of Opoho Church's feedback on the proposal.

Psalm writing is creative and rewarding, and who knows, our psalms might just speak to some one else. We hope you enjoy these psalms from our first two years of writing psalms.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm Writing Group, Opoho Presbyterian Church

Andrew's Psalms

Psalm in Anticipation of Fish and Chips

Steam rising. Salt and fish and potato.
Wrapped in yesterday's newspell
You meet us on the beach, sand and sauce and savour.
Burning charcoal, smoke wafting smell towards us.
We inhale. We eat. Our teeth are on edge.
Spirit inescapable with every breath
Warm in buttered bread, transferred heat runs oil down our fingers.
Sizzling sausage, bursts and sings with joy.
Cold on the streets, but warm inside.
Amber light, wet pavement. Shared company.
Ocean's deep, treasure hidden in fields.
God, we make encounter, and our eyes meet.
Share in our meal. Unseen guest, be welcome.

Andrew Smith

August 2017 ~ Part of the activity of the Psalm writing group is to meet over fish and chips. I wrote this as a stream of consciousness about the experience of eating fish and chips. It turns out the reader can include their own experience in the psalm. The shared experience at the end caught people by surprise.

A Psalm for Tumultuous Times

Or maybe, the beginnings of a manifesto

On the first afternoon God gave us a world.

On the second afternoon God laid down the soil beds.

On the third afternoon God seeded trees and plants.

God spent a long afternoon designing micro-organisms and bugs.

God really liked those!

God tuned the dawn chorus of a variety of birds.

We came here as human beings.

And on a last afternoon God will ask us, Did you like my world? I spent a lot of time over that. What did you do with it?

(Selah)

God, fools have taken over the thrones of empires.

They speak with words of a language of violence.

In the fame of extremism we will be your radical moderates.

We will recognise in others who are our friends the virtues of humanity, hospitality and civil discipleship, that we would want to see in ourselves.

We will see your creation and your science in this universe that you have given us.

We will participate in a community that keeps our religious metaphors alive.

We will be your reasonable people, and you will be our God.

This is our prayer.

Andrew Smith

September 2017 ~ Two ideas that I hung together. If we believe in a Creator God then we are answerable to God for our management of the world. Especially one that God has spent some time in creating to encourage and maintain a diversity of life. In an age of political and religious extremism we need a statement that a generous moderacy and reason is a viable and important option if we are all to survive, continue, and flourish.

The Psalm of the Cat

A contextual psalm

The Lord is my cat.

He trips my feet. I stumble into unexpected places and I land in surprising ways.

I trail a piece of string, and he haunts my footsteps.

A mighty hunter pursues me. His claws discipline me.

We lie down together to rest, he curls up beside me, his purring comforts me.

In the watches of the night he demands my attention. I rise to meet him.

He does not fear the rain and the cold by day. He knows his territory.

He enters through the window, he scratches at the door and announces himself.

I delight to hear his call. He returns to me and I welcome him.

Surely he will be my company every evening.

Andrew Smith

August 2017 ~ The Psalm of the Cat was the first psalm I tried writing. It was written after my cat had gone missing for four days just after I had adopted him. It is written as a pastiche of the language of the psalms, and to put a positive spin on living with a demanding pet. It has proven popular.

Psalm for the Prince of the Castle

Lord, your people have been those who have observed your solemnities
We have kept your doctrines; we have proclaimed your gospel.
We live in you, and you live in us.
But yet, Lord, we find ourselves living in an age where you are absent.
We look into the castle of our hearts and find you have gone into exile.
God-shaped Lord, we find that we are still here.
Where are you gone? We are waiting on you.
We are still seeking you. Keep us faithful.
Do not rob us of grace and repentance. Keep alive the light within us.
Do not let it be dowsed.
When you find us again, greet us with your peace, and we will make the
counter-sign.

Andrew Smith

A psalm written November 2017 that we have a god-shaped hole in us that in a whole where our mind tells us we live in a universe where God is absent. We keep doing the rituals and the practices even though they appear to have become irrelevant. The Prince of the Castle refers to Gormenghast, the fantasy castle which continues its rituals even though its prince has rejected tradition and gone into exile in the world. Some people find this a sad psalm. The final line refers to the World War I poem 'Jesus of the Scars'.

Advent Calendar Psalm

You shall count off twenty-four days before the feast of Christmas,
and call them the season of Advent.
Lord, how shall I count off the days?
With a good news message that offers me no enchantment?
With a southern summer solstice that blots out the gospel story?
With chocolate and small tokens that anticipate the giving of gifts?
I have a winter triptych to reveal the counting of days, a northern winter.
Open all the doors, what will it reveal?

Holly and ivy – sting and red berry, clinging vine
star of wonder, star of light
Christmas bauble, and orange and peach,
Christmas wreath, and a gift waiting to be unwrapped
Christmas cracker with its own little gift and paper crown
Fir tree, tree of life, hinge of the world, laden with decorations
Robin in the snow, and hanging bells on the green
Sleigh on the snowy ground, full of gifts, following a star, and snowman
outside
Father Christmas, gift-giver, winter-man
Goose for the table, and the ox knows his owner, and the donkey his
master's crib
Partridge in a pear tree – Christ on a cross, and behind the banner, the
candle, the light of the world
Gold, frankincense and myrrh, from the nativity play, after comes the
shepherd with his sheep
Camels under a palm-tree and a starry sky, angel in the highest arch –
glory and good will
Holy family in the centrepiece, fleeing the star's annunciation, the Christ
child becomes the refugee

The world is hollowed out and heaven is near
In folk sign and holy telling I see the anticipation
and you come near, Emmanuel, God-with-us, hello!

Andrew Smith

*5 September 2018 ~ I wanted to write a psalm to celebrate an
Advent calendar I wanted to retire and replace because one of the
shutters was damaged. It is full of images and I wanted to capture
some of its enchantment.*

Advent Psalm

Ah Dear Lord, the days are full of light, the world is growing and greener,
midsummer is a week away.

We celebrate a season of light, and yet we celebrate with symbols of
winter festivals

– light in the dark time of the year.

On Halloween and on All Saints' Day you shut the gates of the dead and
hold back the monsters.

At Diwali the head of the Demon King is crushed.

On Guy Fawkes Night we light fireworks into the night.

On the eight days of the Dedication the temple is restored and the
covenant is renewed.

And at Christmas we celebrate again the birth of the holy Christ Child,
born downstairs among the domestic animals

– because upstairs was too full of whanau for there to be room

– beginning a life whose ultimate goal would be to be the host of
party in that upstairs room.

So let us celebrate with family as you were once surrounded by family at
your birth.

Let us give gifts and remind ourselves of the gift of life that comes from
you alone.

Let us feast around the table with three kinds of meat, and new potatoes,
and strawberries and cream and ice cream to follow – winter food and
summer foods together.

And do not let the preparation overwhelm us, and destroy our festivity.

Let us remember that you prepare the feast at the end of time, and this is
a foretaste for when you gather us all in.

In your upside-down kingdom, the comfortable shall serve the poor, the
marginal, and the landless.

Your coming kingdom is so near, let it break into our lives, and turn us
around, so we are left facing you.

Lord, bring hope. Lord, bring peace. Lord, bring joy.

Andrew Smith

13 March 2019 ~ *A prayer of intercession in Advent combining
themes:*

- *that from October to December we have a season of festivals
of light from multiple traditions, originally celebrated in winter-
time, that we celebrate in summer time because of our
calendar*

- *that Jesus was born surrounded by extended family in the lower story of the house, and his life was a movement to the upstairs room of the house, to the Last Supper, and to his death*
- *that Christmas is our ultimate family celebration, and it can be a source of stress, see <https://publicaddress.net/up-front/its-beginning-to-look-a-lot-like-shitmas/> by Emma Hart.*

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Isaiah and the Psalmist meet Andrew

Dear God, forgive me if I'm being impertinent,
but is there an ecology of heaven?

When the lion lies down with the lamb,
who will be the megafauna?

When a child can put their hand in the hole of an asp,
will the eggs of a serpent's nest be safe?

Will we keep gardens
when cypresses grow up like weeds?

In the light of eternity, when death is no more,
what will we commit to earth and worms?

Will there be dirt under our fingernails in the gardens of paradise?

Will you restore the unity between the angel-host and the angle-worm,
like it was in the beginning?

What are the great beasts of heaven, the living creatures? What should
we fear?

Your anger, your majesty, your judgment?

Will the deep waterfall call out to the ocean depths around your throne?

Will the sun and the day cry out your name in silent voices?

What will sting us into action, in the gardens of the LORD?

Teach us,
what it is like to be predator,
and what it is like to be prey,
on the trail-ways of heaven.

Dear God, forgive me if I'm being impertinent,
but is there an ecology of heaven?

Andrew Smith

April 2018 ~ A fun psalm – what happens to us after we die? Will heaven be a safe place? What will we do with all the time in the universe? One line was stolen from Madeleine de L'Engle's 'A Wind in the Door'. The psalm-writing group helped to shape this psalm.

Psalm against Amalek

Then the LORD said to Moses, write this as a reminder in a book, and recite it in the hearing of Joshua – I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

Deuteronomy 17:14

O God, a man of violence entered the Mosque.

They said to him, "Welcome Brother," as invitation to enter in.

And like the angel of death, he stole from them their lives in a place, and in a country, where they should be safe – it can't happen here.

He took from them their lives, but he cannot take from them their names.

They are names that seem unpronounceable to us, strange, foreigners in the land – they are our names now – to learn to pronounce, and to recite.

As for his name, let it be blotted out like Amalek, let it be eaten, the spirit of godlessness, of religion without vitality.

In a spirit of humanity, make us a nation, of every creed, people of every colour, of each gender – O God, defend our free land.

We would be reconciled, we would be forgiven, we would be united, we would be safe here.

Make our cause just and right, may rain fall on us, may blessings and good words come from you – that we may live long in the land, because our hope is in you.

In defiance of the spirit of Amalek,
we shall be resolute in our discipleship,
and in our shared witness, and our shared respect,
because we remember the names.

Andrew Smith

Inspired by the Prime Minister's statement that she will not use the name of the Christchurch Mosques shooter, and the names of his

victims are far more important. I was also reading an article on the Religion News Network, the opinion piece, Are we witnessing the triumph of evil?, by Jeffrey Salkin at

<https://religionnews.com/2019/03/18/mosque-killings-christchurch-islam/>.

Psalm 85

You favoured, LORD, your land, you have returned the captivity of Jacob

You lifted the variance of your people, you covered up how much they
missed

You held in your outburst, the heat of your breath backed off from us
Come back to us, the God who saves us, and give no authority to your
troubled state of mind

Will you drag out your anger to generations after generations?

Will you not give life back to us so that you people might rejoice in you?

Let us see, LORD, your mercy, and give us your salvation.

Will I hear what the God, the LORD, will say for he will speak peace to
his people, and to his saints, but he will not let them return to
thickheaded answers

But near to those who are fearful of him is his salvation, dwelling glory in
our land

Mercy and truth are encountered, right practice and peace have kissed
Truth out of the land sprouts and right practice from the sky leans down

As well the LORD will the good and our land will give its produce

Right practice will go before him and make a path for the tread of his
feet.

Andrew Smith

For a meeting working from the Psalms in the Bible I chose to look at Psalm 85 and work out a translation that satisfied me working from a Hebrew Word Study, looking at the meaning of the words in Hebrew. I am not sure if it is finished yet as I don't think I have responded to the text.

An Intercession for Walkers

Lord, you have given me the choice to walk the streets of the city,
you have given me the choice to tread them into recognition,
to give them meaning.

In fine weather or in rain, I should like to see the sky above me, the open sky.

I am not afraid of the sun-dried street,
the invasive rain and puddles, the snowy day that chills my feet
and fingers.

I ask you that I may see the open sky above me.

I ask you for wide open streets, I ask for leafy hills that rise around me.
Keep me from the cities of the flat plains and the narrow lanes.

I seek the variety of my cities.

I welcome the human company

– the walkers, the commuters, the flâneurs, the strollers, the
joggers, the prams,
and the other people on paws and wings.

They are me and I am them, we are one in our intention to be out on the
street and walking.

May all your children reach their furthest goal and return again to their
homes,
their final destination.

Let us avoid the e-scooters, the skateboarders, the mobility scooters, the
bikes on the paths,
the car coming around the corner.

Keep us sharp of ear and light on our feet. We will let them pass.

And so we walk, we may even march, though not in step
– ours is the beat of everyone to their own home,
to their own workplace, to their own garden.

We are uncertain of the future, we are uncertain of change, we are
certain of one thing
– that our destination is in you.

We are confident of this – that we will come to our everlasting
destination.

In our circadian cycles of life, may our footwear be strong and sturdy, our
coats keep out the rain,

our hats keep the sky at bay, our bags be near to carry – because
we hope in you.

We are walking because we follow you.

In the name of the One who wanders ahead of us, around the next
corner.

Amen.

Andrew Smith

I realised that I hadn't written about my love of walking. Once when walking down Great King Street from my flat on London Street to Knox College, two workmen came out of Signal Hill Flats workshop, and one of them turned to me and said, "You have been walking these streets for decades!" And I have, since 1994. I am so proud of that moment. I wanted to write something about our uncertainty as a parish as we enter a vacancy, but the description of my joy of walking just flowed out, including reference to Charles Brasch, another walker of Dunedin streets, and the introduction of the useful word flâneur, which means 'idler, stroller.'

Candi's Psalms

Psalm for Creation

Always just God, summon your court
and put us on trial.

The charges...negligence
looking in the other direction
disobedience
dereliction of duty
corporate greed

The victims... oh, God, the list is endless
bears, elephants, calves, pigs, chickens
living a hell-on-earth existence
beaten and bloodied
caged, crated, crippled,
expendable. Animals
yes, but reframed
in our little capitalist brains
as production units
of body parts, body fluids

God, we like pretty animal images
we swap cute cat videos
we say "worthy is the lamb"
and sing "the Lord is my shepherd"
we like the verse about you, God,
marking the sparrow's fall

Once, in Adam, we named the animals

God, give us your verdict and quash our excuses!
We've been out of step with Creation for too long
Remind us...give us that mind's eye vision
of how it was in the Beginning
the dew still fresh, glistening
and there we were, your Genesis people, shining
reflecting your image
so we could be the stewards you wanted us to be
of all your creatures, great and small

Huge in mercy and grace God, forgive us!

Candi Young

2018 ~ *This psalm grew out of an intercessory prayer I wrote for church a few weeks ago. I have never prayed specifically for animals before in church, but that particular week I felt moved to do so.*

Psalm of Disappointment

Father, on Ash Wednesday morning –
I made an extra pledge for Lent this year
...to give up buying things
packed in single-use plastics.

On Ash Wednesday evening
I went shopping. I bought
salmon and tortellini in plastic trays.

Father, were you surprised?
I was...and disappointed and bothered
how easy it is to just glide along
in robot mode, doing what I always do...
how easy it is to forget promises to You.

So thank you, Father, for this lesson in being
attentive, mindful, disciplined...a deep
slow-moving river, not a shallow
inconstant, higgledy-piggledy creek.

Candi Young

2019 ~ The idea of avoiding buying single-use plastics came from an article in the Washington Post about a church that decided to do this over Lent. Obviously, Lent is much greater than plastics, but it was more of a group commitment extra to the individual Lenten commitments made by the church members.

And I still learned a valuable lesson from failure.

Psalm Against Dark Forces

God, we're surrounded, hemmed in
our enemy has us in a stranglehold
even if we struggle we cannot break free
for our enemy has trained us from birth to be obedient
to fit into our place in the chain gang
produce, consume
to be a good citizen
produce, consume

The enemy has invaded our languages
seeded them with his dark incantations
profit and loss, market share
gross domestic product...lingo, jingo, bingo

gross images of consumption are everywhere
on the radio, the TV, streaming through the ether in torrents
wrapping buildings in electric banners flashing with dollar signs
share market algorithms – algorithms, algorithms everywhere
and not a drop to drink for the poor, the downtrodden
those who don't produce don't get to consume.

And so we stand at the feet of this Ozymandias of our own making
Oh God, break our chains!

Candi Young

I switched on the radio the other day for some light entertainment and was yet again bombarded with the latest news about the economy, business confidence, share markets and other general money waffle. I am saddened about the social havoc our economic system has caused. What a terrible shame we didn't decide to go with God's economy instead – the one where the meek inherit the earth and people store up their riches through being humble and merciful.

Psalm on March 15

Oh God, that terrible day
that day of the shooting
it felt like the bottom
dropped out of our country
that terrible day
when fifty people died
praying at a Mosque,
shot down in cold blood
feeling they were safe
feeling they were close to You
being obedient. We struggle
to get our heads around this
we struggle against a desire to cry out
“God, where were you, where
were you on that terrible day?”
Oh God our Father –
you understand
our pain and confusion.

Examine us – Adam’s unruly brood –
help us gather up our emotions,
reactions, questions
and ponder them...deeply.
Help us to be analytical
to discover what each of us must learn
to both do and not do.
What should we allow?
What should we speak against, stand
against, and when, and how?
Please, God, our Father
anoint us with your wisdom.

Candi Young

This psalm arose from a prayer of intercession I offered at church a week after the March 15 massacre. I realized in the days after the shootings how, despite my belief in equality and treating everyone as fellow humans, I am sometimes guilty of unconscious bias towards people of other race and beliefs.

Psalm for Autumn Skies

Lord, I praise you for autumn
for earthy mornings moist with dew
apples, pears spilling over
in streams of red and green
our shoes crunching on leaves
but most of all, those autumn skies
brimming with stars so crisp, so clear
a geometry so sublime

Lord, I wish I could have been there
and seen you firing up the furnaces
leaping joyful amongst the waves
radiant and unseen, diving reckless
through black holes and teaching them
their siren songs. I wish I could have felt
the whiplash of galaxies red-shifting
past the starting sign

I praise you, Lord, master of the universe
for evening skies alive, rippling electric
with the light of worlds without end.
Infinity is hard for us to grasp
infinite love even harder
and yet here we are
staring at your stars
wooing us.

Candi Young

I went to a talk by Brother Guy Consolmagno about philosophy, science and religion and his role as Vatican Astronomer. I've always been interested in astronomy and space (travel, research, etc.) so the talk was an absolute treat and rekindled my wonder at the universe. Coming home often after dark now, when the stars are out and you can see the Milky Way as clear as a bell, I just had to write a psalm about it all.

Manus Island Psalm

God, this is not our home, this place of blistering heat
suffocating us slowly with its dank humidity
night odours of sweat and foul breath
of decay, degeneration, degradation
strangling our hearts, our spirits.
The cold-steel eyes of the prison guards
the callous, careless arrogance of the Malaria nurses
God, this is not our home.

We survive during the day thanks to an old tree
spreading its branches, creating a canopy...
our tent in this alien wilderness.
This is not our home, but it is a refuge
from the oppression of this place
from ever-present surveillance
from nights clutching tightly to our nightmares
from being broken down slowly from without and within
...decay, degeneration, degradation.

God, this is not our home, this place of brokenness
of noise for the sake of noise. Our songs, our poetry
have no meaning here, our images are lost to us
they remain behind in the mountains buried in snow
in rivers and waterfalls drumming the ancient chants.
Our metaphors have no substance here in this barren place.
We would weep, God, if we were not sucked dry.

This is not our home...but that home, that place where we began
grew, soaked up our language and history, turned on us.
So God, teach us to negotiate this culture of oppression
help us to enter into this new landscape, find a language of exile
...help us to survive.

This is not our home, and yet it is our only home.

Candi Young

I'm currently reading Behrouz Boochani's book No friend but the mountains. Mr Boochani is a Kurdish journalist who was forced to leave his homeland. He endured great hardship to try and get to

Australia, but ended up incarcerated on Manus Island. It struck me how his exile in the Manus Island Detention Centre echoes aspects of Psalm 137 where the exiled people of Israel weep beside the rivers of Babylon.

Kieran's Psalms

Lord, You are the Teacher

Lord, You are the teacher.
From day one you've had a path for me.

You've set your curriculum
You've created a classroom for me.

You are the teacher
And from day two, you've had to pick me back up

I was led astray
Sat back in the class and goofed around.

You held back a laugh,
You sternly moved me back to my path.

You are the teacher
And from day three, you've explained it all again

I was a bit confused
I didn't understand what you meant.

You smiled, you sat down
Opened my ears and my eyes.

You are the teacher,
and from day four you've set me straight

I opened my mouth again,
Spat out words I wasn't sure I meant

You dragged me back,
Away from the fork in the road

You are the teacher,
And from each day ahead, you're there for me

I opened my arms,
I ran back to you every time

You took me in when I was lost
And every time found a way to
Bring me back.

Kieran Haldeman-Somerville

November 13 2018 ~ God is the teacher. Like an academic lecturer or primary school teacher - he only wants the best for those he is in charge of, yet even so those he is not. I've pulled, pushed and kicked and screamed against the evangelical upbringing I had. He's been there even when I was ready to quit. Like my second psalm explains - the unusual places is where I find God.

I see him in the books I read, the TV I watch and the people I see. I see him working through my own teachers. He's not just in the history of the past or in the bible. He never wanted perfect people or perfect worlds. He wanted curiosity and wonder.

I am the Beats of a Drum

I am the beats of a drum.
I am lines to a song.

Lord, you're the muse - you're the composer.
You set the tempo, the phrasing and the flow.

I am the paints, and the brushes

You Lord, are the artist that sets the final brush strokes to the canvas.
You paint the final picture in my mind, and help me see clearer.

I am the words, I am the pages.

You are the author of my life Lord,
It could be my most action filled, dramatic days..
It could be my most romantic.

I am the humbled child in front of you

You are the creator of everything in front of me.
From the pencils to the ink pens to the speech bubbles..

I am myself Lord.
I am all that I can be.

Because of you.

Kieran Haldeman-Somerville

November 13 2018 ~ I wrote this because my faith isn't bound by the archaic idea of rules and regulations. God brings together what he needs me to be and that's how I feel my faith is.

Stan Lee, the man who created marvel comics with the late jack Kirby passed away on November 12 us time. Comics have always been my world. The way these pages used allegory to teach and share was and still is amazing. God may not be directly in everything - but his influence is.

People when I was a kid used to say I couldn't think that way - everything I was ever into was the devil. My faith depended less on the rules of secularism vs godlike media - and more finding him in the nooks and hooks inside the extraordinary.

I don't think younger generations should feel left out because not everyone or everything is exactly one person's idea of Christ and Christ like is.

Margaret's Psalms

On being Presbyterian #1

Holy God, Steadfast Lover, Nonstop Creator, Son full of Grace, Spirit Friend

I love that we explore who you are with our own words and pictures— not using the same words from a prayer book each Sunday

Creating, Imagining, Loving, Forgiving, Transforming, Reforming God
I love that you are an ‘ing’ God, active in our world and us forever. You explode out of the cages of those who try to keep you static in the past

Challenging, Radical, Subversive God
I love that you come at us as the cutting edge of love –shame that we hide in the bluntness of institutionalism

God of Expansive and Intimate Relationship
I love that you know me, that we chat and figure things out together yet you seek loving relationship with the whole world and throughout time. Wow! Why do we think you belong to just us?

God who, in Jesus, sought out the different and the despairing, the diverse and the ‘disgusting’
I love that you welcome all with no entry criteria but love. Yet in your name many are excluded. How dare we?

God Revealed in Scripture and in life
I love that we are encouraged to know you in study, sharing, questioning, discerning. Hard work sometimes but always a rich harvest

Holy Love. Invasive Presence. Determined Spirit. Praise be to the God who loves us.

Margaret Garland

The Story ~ I chose to become a Presbyterian rather than another denomination in my adulthood because I really could identify with the way in which we embraced diversity, allowed difference of opinion, educated with an eye to increasing understanding rather than being told what I needed to believe, and the encouragement of questions and growing in faith. In these years of ministry I have found that not everyone appreciates these things and in fact is trying to take some of it away. I have also come to know Jesus Christ way more deeply and he too would weep at the way we as church have interpreted God's love and purpose.

Psalm on the Seismic Assessment

Praise God, there is jubilation in the air;
our church building is safe, we have nothing to fear!

What's that we say – 'sit back now and at rest'.
I don't think so. Can we honestly say we are doing our best?
Christ calls us to life, to nourish and give.
To be a faith community in which Jesus lives.

Its time to take stock, to search and explore
how we grow in our faith, how we open the door
for building relationship: God, neighbour, us:
for supporting each other, being kind without fuss.

Even more, you suggest! There's more you require?
Fit our building to purpose, spend some money, aim higher!
Spread wings, be a haven, revamp and build:
drop walls (of exclusion), chance breaking the mould
Conversation with 'other' is a path to pursue
Shared buildings, differing beliefs, God's way has many hues

Christ is our light, the world is our neighbour
Demanding our focus and deserving our labour.
Our church is a beacon for life and for grace
A place and a people that live out our Lord's peace.

Community serving, alive all the week
New ideas, being flexible, spiritual depth as we seek.
Let's be brave and discerning, courageous and prayerful
Serving Jesus, loving God in the world we all care for.

What's that you say? Every blessing and strength,
As we search out our future, whatever the lengths.
Give us trust and belief and a heart for your way
as we talk and discover and find purpose we pray.

Praise God! There is jubilation in the air.
We are held in Christ's grace and we need have no fear.

Margaret Garland

Story: Our church had an unexpected journey with our building assessment process. Our grading for the initial seismic assessment came out at a D and we decided to commission a full engineering report for our future planning. We prepared for a leadership retreat sure that we would confirm the findings only to be given an A rating. It was discombobulating to change our thinking and tempting to forgo all the innovative thinking that the D rating had encouraged. This poem was my attempt to keep us in the path of new beginnings.

Praying: An Attempt to Unscrew the Inscrutable

the moment of conversation before beginning and when ended
the peace of understanding that we are loved and belong
the cry of anguish when life is really hurting

wrestling with you, angry, bewildered, abandoned – yet never by you
holding others before you...
weeping for them with you...
working for them alongside you...
praying for self – for courage, for discernment, for forgiveness, for daily
baptism

the prayer that is creation – held in wonder and beauty
the prayer of silence and stillness
the prayer of the body of Christ gathered together

praying karakia
a place of possibility and potential
the power to change and make right
a gift to make real the presence of the divine

whakawhetai ki te te Atua – amene
thanks be to God – amen

Margaret Garland

The Story ~ this psalm arose out of a phrase used in our prayer group meetings – ‘don’t unscrew the inscrutable’ when speaking about prayer. The amusing thing was that I mixed up this title and initially named the poem ‘An attempt to unscrew the unscrupulous’ causing great hilarity. Prayer has always been a place of discomfort for many – questions like ‘how do we do it properly?’, ‘What should we ask for?’, ‘what does personal prayer look like?’ are common and others simply avoid it yet prayer is a broad and many faceted part of our faith. My reading of the Psalms and other OT scripture as well as various worship experiences also fed into this. The reference to karakia came from an article by the same person who fed me the title in the prayer time.

Flaming Prayer

Silence – what to do?

Enforced silence, expectant silence, courteous silence as she reads and I wait.

Love the candle – its flame is strong and dances almost.

There – it is absolutely still. Perfect symmetry – peaceful, resting.

Now it swirls around – looking, seeking, watching – who needs me?

It erupts, jagged and bursting with energy – watcha me, watcha me - you can almost hear the childlike delight. This way, that way, again and again.....

Now it settles – but the top of the flame is gently pulsating as if waiting for the next move, a gracefilled heartbeat

Then rest.

A borrowed thought – within in the flame, dragged up from the source of its life – words of wisdom, hope, promise. Spiraling round and up until they are released into the warm air that is above the flame.

The heart of the candle becomes the light, the light shows us the way, the way releases the word into the world. Amen.

Margaret Garland

The Story ~ I was sitting waiting while my Supervisor read a report I had prepared and my eyes were drawn to the flame of the candle we always have lit. The flame was beautiful and mesmerising and evocative. Watcha me is a phrase our daughter used as a child especially when she was about to come down the slide – such enthusiasm and delight. Later I spoke with someone else about my thoughts and they shared the additional image of a candle being a source - which was too good to not share.

A Psalm of Assurance

Holy God – you have us in hand.
You, who created all that is –
You, who knew us before we were conceived –
You, who turn our lives upside down with your truth, your Word –
You have us in the cradle of your hands.

Why is it then that I feel that a minute misstep of mine will curdle the universe?

Why do I consider something a misstep when you are smiling with delight at a heart that cares?

Why am I so hard on myself – do I not trust in you?

Of course I do – but I really want to show you how well I can do too – when actually you want us to do this together.

So help me to know, not just in my head but also in my heart, that – together we speak unlikely and unpolished words of truth, together we create hope out of stumbling attempts to console, together every moment, every action, every prayer offered in love is a touch of the Christ.

I am tired and my well was empty – yet in these words of prayer I am filled again, held in the cradle of God's hands. Thanks be to God.

Margaret Garland

January 2018 ~ This psalm came out of a supervision session where I talked about my self doubts, my desire to be all things to all people ie perfect – something that I especially do when I get tired and empty. I shut God out, reverting to needing to be polished for God before I can enter into relationship with God.

Daisy Chains ...

Ah the bliss of a soft Dunedin spring day
when the grass is covered in daisy flowers
and the breeze is just perfectly breezy!
There is a buzz in the air of activity -
a time to mow and trim and instigate new things.

So what are you saying to me, Holy God?
Get moving, be energised, get busy –
or be still and enjoy the moment:
I really hope it is the latter!
For that seems to fit my inclination.

And what should I do with that stillness?
What I really want is your touch, your voice,
your peace, a time of close encounter.
For it is when I am silent that you are best heard,
when I stop rushing frantically, you have room to move...

Ah the bliss of a soft Dunedin spring day
for here you are ...and here I am
in sweet communion, in perfect peace,
daisy chains in my lap as I contemplate your creation
the breezes filling my soul with your peace.

Margaret Garland

November 2018 ~ In a peaceful moment found in the midst of busyness in the church garden these words came. I have always adored the daisy covered lawn – they pop up so quickly and remind me always of that story where a child saw the daisy covered lawn as a wonderland, and the adult saw it as an affront to the pristine lawn – I know which way I want to go....

Postscript: Between the writing of this psalm early afternoon and the reading of it to the psalm group early evening – the lawns that had inspired were mown and all the daisies disappeared...

My 'Paul' Dilemma

Holy God, you demand, you beseech of us a oneness in Christ.
I confess there is one of your saints that I haven't exactly been rude to
but certainly have avoided getting to close to.

His name is Paul – and we have a complex, yet developing relationship.
Moments of absolute beauty, stunning in their raw courage,
compassionate love, wise counsel,
knowledge of human nature, of all things God.
Moments of real frustration, stumbling blocks,
solutions that are used to exclude and oppress today,
sexist statements, uncompromising 'rightness'.

Do we have a personality clash I wonder?
What would it be like to be in the same room talking God talk? Would we
survive?

I suspect so – in fact we might be really good mates under Christ's yoke.
Guaranteed lively but we would both learn and grow and get to know
each other.
The two Johns would be delighted at that – they know Paul differently to
me
- it is their mission to introduce me properly to this most excellent of
disciples.

I wonder what Paul would say to us as a church today?

Can't you see him – Paul dictating a letter to the Christian church in
Aotearoa New Zealand!

chastising us for our waywardness,
refusing to take on a mantle of 'know it all'!
begging us instead to yoke ourselves to Christ,
entreating us to love one another,
urging us to listen to and be obedient to the
way of Jesus

Paul I am looking forward to getting to know you even better – shalom
my friend

Margaret Garland

The Story ~ One day after church two Pauline scholars, visiting theologian John Barclay and local theologian and history academic John Stenhouse took the opportunity to address my reluctance to engage with the epistles written by Paul. They knew of my difficulty with some of his pronouncements and I was presented with a book written by John B to read and discover the Paul that they knew. Not perfect but heart in the right place. I am reading the book!

Person of God

Person of God, how might we address you?

Each title, every descriptor seems either too small, confines you, alienates you....yet others take you beyond our reach.

How might we converse with your many aspects: closely intimate and yet transcendent?

Father – a comforting image for some of us and the solid rock of Jesus.

Mother – tempting but continues the gender focus.

He – Grrrrrrr.

Creator –activity and interaction and new things.

Lover – edgy in today's world but should that stop us?

Mystery – perfectly expressive or perfectly fluffy?

Jaweh / jehovah – the 'I am'... a whispered name made real in Jesus Christ.

Lord – yes, just not all the time....

And all those Omni-something words:
the language of reverence and awe keeping us from contempt.

Instead I will say:

You are eternity dipping into our time

You are rock, cornerstone, cross-bearer.

You are healer, listener, parent.

You are provocative, unexpected, foolish in the eyes of the world
You are the centre of my life, the wonder of my faith, the completeness
of my reality

Loving God, in the end there are no words – you are ,,,, and I believe.....

Margaret Garland

The Story ~ A continuing tale within ministry – language used in services, hymns etc! I am passionate about this. Linked in with preaching a series from John's Gospel on the 'who do you say I am' passages, this is my attempt to share how I see a God only called Father as an example of both exclusive maleness and a curtailment of the breadth and depth of who God is. Others I know do not see a need to debate terminology and are happy to always use 'he' and 'Father', not causing but continuing to encourage gender inequality.

Creative God

Holy God – you are a weaver
 you who create the intricate relationships of all creation
 of whale with plankton, of people with you, of land with sea and sun
with moon
you create in us unimagined patterns out of diverse threads
you teach us to touch each other and to breathe together.

Holy God – you are an artist
 you who colour a canvas that draws us further into life
 showing us visions and dreams of new life and hope filled
 landscapes
you allow us to ponder your truth, to see it in different lights:
the abstract, the poignant, the stark, the inspirational..... the belonging.

Holy God – you are a composer
 you who brings forth the harmonies of our created world
 playing the notes of joy and pain and solitude and purpose through
 your people
you encourage us to lift our voices, never discordant in praise of you
in the music of our world we find solace, peace, community,
encouragement, sheer delight

Holy God – you are a gardener
 you who create the earth and tend all that grows on it
 the cacti and the rata, the cabbage and the kauri
you nurture and water and feed your people with abundant love, unfailing
grace
you teach us to be gardeners too, so that all life might grow and flourish.

Holy God – you are all this and so much more!

Margaret Garland

July 2018 ~ As a person nurturing my love of weaving through lessons at the moment there are many examples of how it parallels the way we are in relationship with each other and with God. The gathering of threads in different ways to create new thing, unexpected patterns is intuitive imagery for me. Yet I see and know God all around – I love the understanding that we worship a creative and creating God who encourages us to bring out theology to the world in not just prose, but in poetry and art and the world around us.....

Psalm 42

In the parched expanses of the paddocks cracked open with drought
the grass, the tree, the land cry out for water.
So I thirst for you, Holy One.

In the soulless asphalt and the hovering high rises
the city cries out for the expanse of horizon
and the smell of rich soil.
So I hunger for you, Holy One.

How can you be so absent; where is your face in the poverty
and the greed and the grey nothingness
of self absorption that surrounds me?

People laugh at me from their high towers,
pour their putrid waste over me asking
where is this God that you turn to?

Dripping with the scorn of my adversaries,
I dig deep to remember when you first came to me,
how we danced and laughed with expectation and delight in you,
how we worshipped you with such passion
and yet here I am, scorned and derided, eyes cast down, feet dragging.

Yet I remember that tune of hope – a small skip emerges, the eyes begin
to lift.
I remember the times when you lifted me up from the pit,
the times when the waters of chaos
seemed to overwhelm me
and you were there.

Yet I cannot seem to touch you now – where are you, Holy One?

How do I answer those who oppress and insult me and say ‘Where is
your God?’

From the depths of my longing I know the faithfulness of my God, I hear
the answer in my heart:

‘Why are you despondent? Do you not know the depth of my love for
you?’

I tell you again: trust in me, hope in me, walk with me
through the derision and the scorn and the nothingness

and lift your voice in praise for I am with you.
Know, my beloved, that in the longing is the belonging, always and
forever.'

Margaret Garland

August 2019 ~ This has long been a favourite psalm, both read and sung. It began and ended as a paraphrase yet not completely, for woven through it are parts of me and my response to the psalmist's cry for sustenance. I especially spent time with the phrase '...that in the longing is the belonging....

A Psalm of Despair and a Call for Help

There are no words Holy God –
You are a God beyond denominations, beyond faiths, all
encompassing, all loving

Yet I sit here in this lockdown, physically safe but spiritually shell
shocked
For they have shot down the mosque –
the invidious, unknown 'righteous' have killed your children,
sprayed them with bullets and with hatred.

How dare they? How could they? Why have they?

The young man in the room with me – a minute from entering the
mosque for prayers.
A nice ordinary friend, co-worker, husband almost dead for his
faith.....

How have we come to this? What have we allowed that we might
have stood up against? Where is your justice Lord for those mown
down in prayer?

As a Christian I feel ill! As a companion in faith I feel helpless!

The gnashing of teeth, the rending of cloth, the lament of the heart –
it is not enough

God, help us

Margaret Garland

*A Psalm written in the horror of the afternoon of Friday 15 March
2019. I was in Christchurch, in lockdown, in company of one who
was entering the gates of the Mosque when he heard gunshots.
Not yet knowing the full extent of the horror, I had no words but
these.....*

Very Simple Psalm

God who loves all people,
Jesus who walked and talked with all sorts.
Spirit who cares not for our otherness, greeting us all in Christ.

Earth with its eclectic mix,
People with their many ways of being,
Faith with its demands of belief and belonging.

Love expansive and unconditional,
Respect ours to give or withhold as we choose,
Fear a reaction to encountering diversity and otherness.

Jesus teaches us to love and delight in all people – how hard can it be?

Very.....
we build on the trampling of other!
church can become a citadel of like-mindedness!
it's easier to stay close to those who we have some respect for!

Jesus teaches us to love and delight in all people - how hard can it be?

Simple.....
God's love bursting from our heart!
in company with Jesus, hearing the voice of others!
guided by the Spirit, greeting all people as God's beloved children!

One people in all our diversity – praise be to God.

Margaret Garland

Story ~ Having attended a women Minister's retreat and a meeting of KCML graduands in the south, I am reminded of the difference between the words of oneness and the practice of oneness – not so easy. And yet we can do it – when we rid ourselves of fear, presumptions and predetermined outcomes.

A Retiring Offering

There is nothing new under the sun, say I.
It is just retirement, people do it all the time.
Why dwell on it, say I.
You are unique in my eyes, says God.
It is a moment on our journey together.
Shall we honour it together?

It is good to give thanks, say I:
 thank you for opportunity and trust
 thank you for commitment and passion
 thank you for learning and growing
 thank you for the opening of heart and mind
 thank you for giftings and grace to endure
 thank you for encounters and encouragers.
You are welcome, says God, for each moment of thanksgiving is a blessing to be shared.

It is good to lament, say I:
 for doubt that has paralysed
 for opportunities lost
 for shallowness of insight
 for lack of courage
 for failing to trust your promises
 for moments lost to memory.
You are well loved, says God, for each moment of lament binds us more closely together.

It is good to celebrate, say I:
 the friendships and the companions
 the achievements and the failures that were steps on the way
 the laughter and tears of relationship
 the shaping and refining
 the ah-ha moments
 the family alongside on the journey.
You are the celebration, says God, for each moment of love, grace and truth is a light to the world.

*Shall we continue on our way, says God?
I am looking forward to the journey yet to come, say I.
I hope you are as excited as I am, says God. I pray so, for there is much
yet to do.....*

Margaret Garland

October 2019 ~ This psalm was the result of a helpful suggestion of topic. It was written with 4 months of ministry at Opoho left before retirement. The words helped me find a perspective on this challenging time of ending a very precious and grace filled ministry and also recognising that ministry in God's service was mine from the moment of baptism and will continue into the future – albeit expressed in other ways. It also moved me from focusing on the things left undone to the rich and fruitful journey that is ministry in all its wondrous tapestry. May that journey continue for all of us in blessing and in love.

Mary's Psalms

My First Lament

It is a deep, dark place
My soul dips in every so often
Forgetting where I come from
I fall in

I stir about in this void
Thoughts wandering in the dark places
Forgetting where I come from
I feel alone

I touch the sides around
Cold and dank this pit
Forgetting where I come from
I silently cry

I feel around for the rim
Grasping at the smallest hope
Remembering where I come from
I thank my God
I am ok

Mary Somerville

Anticipating Advent

Anticipation begins as soon as I hear someone mention Christmas.
Yet, it's not excitement I feel about all the glitter, lights or commercialism.
It's about hope –“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”, Come soon Lord Jesus

Come with your light blazing,
Come with your light that casts out all darkness,
Come to bring us home.

You came as a wee babe,
Swaddled lightly,
Safe for all to see and stand in awe

You left,
As God incarnate, Our Hope
Wrapped in the light of your Glory!

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” – Soon.

Mary Somerville

This was written as stores and people began to talk of the trappings of a non-Christian Christmas with the commercial Christmas trapping arriving in the stores in September I was sad to see that it was not about quietly spending time waiting in the advent season for Jesus to come. I remembered that my favourite Christmas song is “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” and this song is about waiting and hope in Christ Jesus. And so, we wait.

True Christmas Light

*In the beginning was the Word
And the word was with God,
And the word was God.

Come soon Emmanuel,
God the Word,
Who came into being long before the Christmas morn.

*He was God in the beginning,
Through Him all things were made;
Without Him nothing was made that has been made.

You Lord Jesus made all things
And through your birth, death and resurrection
You made all things new again.

*In Him was life,
And that life was the light
Of all mankind.

You were born that Christmas morn by the brightest star.
Its radiance set out the path to those who were seeking you.

*The light shines in the darkness.
And the darkness has not overcome it.

Even brighter than the Christmas star
Your light outshines all the other light
To cast out darkness.

Oh Everlasting light,
Come Emmanuel,
Come shine on us with your light of love.

Mary Somerville

Thinking of the depth of the light, hope and love of God at Christmas I took excerpts from 1 John 1 and alternated with my hearts thought to bring the light of Christ's birth to focus.

Meegan's Psalms

Manorburn Dam

Manorburn dam is a known name to the locals of Alexandra, it is 1 place where all of the seasons show plainly. In the summer we swim in it, in the winter we skate on it, the autumn we go giant pine cone hunting and in the spring rabbit hunting, looking for wild asparagus or just wandering the rolling hills.

Summer time it is one of the best places to go swimming, there are rocks to jump off, you can swim to the other side of the dam and sunbathe on the flat rocks until the Central Otago heat sends you back into the warm water. Most times when I was below the water I would marvel that only months before I was skating on the exact spot I was now swimming. It was as warm as a swimming pool, but way more beautiful, you would float on the water, watch hawks hunting, soaring above you, in the peripheral you would see the shore, the rocks, cliffs, towering pine trees standing solid in the brown hardened ground. Sitting at the side of the water drying off naturally more often or not you would only hear something rustling in the briar, a hawk calling, the broom pods popping and occasionally the splashing of other groups swimming.

Winter time you would grab your skates, or your slipperiest shoes and head over to the dam to spend hours running around on the hardened water, yes I know it is ice, but the ice of the Manorburn dam talked to you. My nerves sang when the ice creaked, my heart would triple its speed when a crack formed near me as I slid across the ice. There were always dozens of people there on the nice days. Some were curling, others free skating, a puck would come skimming out of nowhere with a shout of warning or some parents had their small children in tow showing them the marvel of nature. If there was an exceptionally loud crack everyone would fall silent, quickly looking around making sure it was just the ice moving, not someone moving the ice. I would stand in the middle and think; I will be swimming here in a few months.

The dam is also integral to Galloway, it is an irrigation dam. Each farm where the water race runs through only gets water for 5 days every 6 weeks often to irrigate a large proportion of their land, it is important, it is life sustaining and it is closely monitored.

I think it is where I fell in love with God. It is a place that, to me, shows the stark beauty of God's love. Every living thing around that area has had to fight for its survival even the weeds. There are no patches of

green grass, only sun burnt brown dirt, sharp rocks, high cliffs and thyme. Yet the place is alive, it hums with life in the summer, ebbing to a whisper in the winter, but it still lives and that is God's doing, never dead, just changed through the seasons, offering something different throughout the year. A good epiphany for my relationship with God, sometimes I hear him perfectly, at others I need to stop and really listen to what he is saying, but I also have the knowledge that he, like the Manorburn Dam will always be there offering me something new to be awed by, to be humbled by and to love.

I would often be awestruck at the beauty that God had created, at his power of making this one place so versatile that it was able to be used in such a way throughout the year.

Meegan Cloughley ~ 22 June 2017

Psalm with No Title

Lord, you must have wondered how one person could be so blind and deaf,
As I crashed blindly through the pitch black room full of sharpened objects,
Running aimlessly fast and hard from the painful past
all the while you were throwing down bubble wrap and gaffer tape trying to protect me
gently saying to stubborn deaf ears
I will not let you fumble

Lord, you must have wanted to face palm several times over as I repeatedly refused to hear you
As I decided the only way forward was to turn and fight, stubbornly digging in my heels
Looking to the distant goal ignoring my immediate surroundings
Even as that goal became unobtainable my intractability to adapt pushed me downward
Deeper into waters of despair
You threw out so many life jackets I could well have been drowning in them, yet I evaded them
Stubbornness telling me I must do this on my own.
Compassionately you were saying to hard of hearing ears
I will not let you fall

Lord did you quirk an eyebrow every time I looked in the mirror with hate in my heart?
I stopped running, I stopped fighting, and felt a failure, loathing who I am
Directionless and aimlessly turning in circles on the spot unsure of what I was meant to be
Still refusing to see the supports you put around me, believing I was not worthy of it, or your love.
Believing my own rigidity was all that kept me upright
Calmly you were calling
I will not let you fail.

Did you smile Lord, or even laugh when I finally unblocked my ears and opened my eyes properly?
Did you do the human reaction of “about bloody time!”?
It took me a few years Lord, to see how you had helped me, how you had protected me
Even when I didn’t want to protect myself.

As spikes I had wrapped myself in slowly wilt away, and I let your love in
I can finally hear you stating
I will help you flourish

Meegan Cloughley ~ August 2017

Scent

Gracious and powerful Lord

The power of smell is wondrous
The flood of memories with each aroma
Rain on sun baked dust
Frosty mornings
Blossom in full bloom
Crashing waves
Old leather bound books
My beautiful cat
To name but a few

All of these bring a rush of memories
All lifting my heart in joy and love
Each time I utter Thank you God for this gift

Granted there are some scents I would rather ignore
Some that cause anxiety and hurt
Times I want to wash my nose with bleach
Even in those times, you are with me
Holding me during those enduring moments

Now, the good outweigh the bad
The love shines stronger than the dark
And throughout it all there is only 1 thing static
That this gift is from the Mighty Father
And he is forever within that gift.

Meegan Cloughley

Tui's Psalms

The Girl Child Who Refused to be Missing

The sun slipped behind Silver Peaks.
It was evening.

A girl child was there. *I want to go
to church with you*, she'd said.
I don't want to stay home.

There were women, one pregnant,
another the preacher. There were men.
The girl child did not know
they were only men
at that last but first table.
She had not seen da Vinci's tableau.

In the room up the stairs she sat on Morfar
as they squeezed around the table:
a bowl and water, candles and coins,
glasses and cloths, bread and 'wine'.
They sang: *Tama ngakau marie,
tama a te Atua, tenei tonu matou,
arohaina mai.*

There was silence.

Into the silence erupted a short, sharp fart.
That was me, owned up the girl child's
two-year-and-ten-month voice.

The girl child shared supper:
fragrant fresh bread
'wine' from kitchen glasses.
She spoke again into silence,
I want some more.

No-one left quietly. Instead
they ate more bread,
drank more 'wine' and chatted
about how the last supper
was incomplete

without women, without children.

Tui Bevin

2017 ~ This is based on the memorable Maundy Thursday service at Opoho Church in 2016 when our granddaughter Rosalie wasn't yet three years old. After the service I wrote about it in my notebook because I was aware that we had experienced something quite special. Much later I felt the need to reflect on it in poetic form and was pleased I had my notes to refer to. It was the first time I'd written about church or God matters and its positive reception in both church and secular circles encouraged me to write more from this side of my life.

Last Thursday

Did you hear what happened
when we met the other night
in the upper room around the long table?

It was the same motely lot
called together by the priest
but this year, three chairs were empty.

Why hadn't the others come?
Couldn't they face claiming their commitment,
and their place in God's unfolding story?

Darkness fell, and as we each spoke
of our dreams for following the Messiah
the girl child lit another candle:

I wanted to make a difference...
 Philip wanted to be in community...
 and Simon wanted an exciting life.

We all chatted and laughed
shared the jugs of 'wine'
and loaves of sweet smelling bread

but then, as we each confessed the cost
the girl child snuffed out another candle
until only one was left to carry the light:

I hadn't expected to give up everything I owned...
 Philip couldn't face being rejected by the world...
 Simon hadn't expected to give up the sword.

But we were left with that one candle
and the memory of the joy and wonder
on the girl child's face as she spread the light

to carry on, to go out into the world
and face what would happen next.
It had to be enough.

Tui Bevin

April, 2019 ~ Written following the 2019 Maundy Thursday service at Opoho Church in which Rosalie (5¾) helped Margaret lighting and then snuffing out candles. Re-enacting the last supper with an engaged young child present is not to be missed.

A 21st Century Psalm of Darkness

Alternative beginnings:

(1)

Oh God, Oh God, Oh God
we're coming towards the end of Lent,

not long now until hot cross buns,
Easter eggs and holidays,

and for those who are ready to hear:
the Good News of Easter morning.

but you know that during these six weeks of Lent
it was mostly business as usual here on earth

(Or 2)

*Compassionate Lord,
we remember the good news of Easter morning,*

*we've said our Hallelujahs
and we've sung about being an Easter people,*

*but should we really leave Lent behind without a thought
of what might happen during a typical six weeks here on earth?*

*We confess that we don't need to look far to see
that it was most likely business as usual:*

69 people would have committed suicide in New Zealand;
and somewhere in the world one person suicided every 40 seconds.

And around the world 6.8 million babies would be born into poverty;
33,600 women would die from pregnancy and childbirth
and 1¼ million under five year olds would die preventable deaths .

Three languages would become extinct;
and a few thousand plant and animal species would become extinct.

There would be 40 active conflicts and wars;
and 3 million guns would be sold in the US alone.

336,000,000 people would fly in airplanes;
and about 4 million acres of tropical rain forest would be lost.

There would be 60 million disposable nappies used in New Zealand,
and 42 billion worldwide.

60.5 billion new plastic bottles would be made and sold;
and roughly the same number of plastic bags will be made and
discarded.

and lastly, the science and numbers on irreversible climate change
are fast becoming too terrifying to contemplate.

Some tell me that what I do or what I don't do
won't make any difference,

but in that case, what will?

What will it take to make people, politicians, and business leaders

~ put faceless others ahead of themselves,
~ put their grandchildren's futures ahead of their greed,

~ put compassion ahead of their anger, and
~ put the environment ahead of their wants?

Lord have mercy on us.
Christ have mercy on us.

Amen

Tui Bevin

*27 March 2018 ~ This is a psalm of frustration about humankind. I
checked the numbers again & again.*

*We used this psalm during the 2018 Climate Change seminars at
Opoho and Knox Christchurch. We read it responsively because,
as I said in a poem I later wrote called Urgent Words: Psalm of
Darkness / came easily and quickly / but was so weighty / it
needed two of us / to read in church.*

Kahuku

in the autumn sunshine
the newly fledged Monarch
flies up and around the swan plant
buffeted by the breeze,

then whooshed away on the wind
the kahuku disappears,
hopeful we watch, waiting
for its flaming wings again.

My head knows
that this is life, to grow,
morph, spread wings wide
and fly far away

but I struggle to trust
the world with my heart.
On this second morning of Lent
the kahuku reminds me

to simply trust
that *All shall be well*
and all manner of thing
shall be well.

Tui Bevin

March 2019 ~ I wrote this while Michael was home visiting from Estonia after sitting having morning tea in the garden at the Steep Café in NEV and watching their first monarch butterfly of the season take off.

Kahuku is Maori for monarch butterfly - Danaus plexippus - our largest butterfly

The most famous quote from the visions of Julian of Norwich, (1342 – 1416>) is "Jesus answered with these words, saying: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'

The Language of Easter

Oh God, I find it difficult to meet Jesus
in the semantic miasma of our making:
Paschal lamb, crucifixion, manifestation,
resurrection, ascension, salvation,
covenant, atonement, passion of Christ,

but I did one Easter morning after walking
up a small hill over icy cobblestones
and frozen snow to a 700 year old cathedral
in Finland for a service in a language
I didn't understand ~ I saw it all

in a glimpse when the priest entered,
there on her back on her white stole
was a large bright red heart
on top of a dark brown cross:
love triumphing over darkness.

Blessed be artists who take us
beyond words that entrap us.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Tui Bevin

15 February 2018 ~ I committed to write a psalm a week for Lent this year to see what would happen. This was my first one. It reflected my concern about theology-speak making the message inaccessible to many people. It was based on when I was in Finland with Helen and went to church at the 700 year old Parvoo Cathedral on Easter Sunday morning.

Harvest Thanksgiving Psalm

Our table overflows
freshly cooked plaited breads
carrots and apples
tomatoes and peas
parsnips and pumpkins
rhubarb and nuts
cereals and tins
crackers and rice
a vase of wildflowers.

We give thanks
for our many blessings
for the fruits of the garden
for peace and hope
for the wonders of creation.

We celebrate
enjoying food together
the children settling on the floor
around a basket of breads
and nuts and vegetables.

We share
the fruits of our gardens
and the labour of hands
with the foodbank
the night shelter
the homeless
the newcomer
those in need.

The age-old words of Deuteronomy remind us
to be grateful for all we receive
to celebrate in community
to share what we have.

It is no more difficult than that.

Thanks be to God.

Tui Bevin

2 April 2019 ~ After the 31.3.2019 harvest thanksgiving service at Opoho Church taken by Simon Rae and Margaret Garland that used a Russian liturgy in which the congregation partakes of the harvest foods before they are given to the needy. (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

Children's Church for Pentecost

Life and laughter fill the church:
there's bubbles and balloons
bouncing children and birthday cake
babbling and blowing out candles.

It is the day of our year for red:
red socks, red scarves, red jerseys
red ribbons, red spots on cheeks,
red cherrios and red tomato sauce
red apples and red jam on pikelets
red for joy and red for the fire of the Holy Spirit
red to celebrate the birth of the church.

I wonder what these children understand
of the trinity and the holy spirit coming to earth
perhaps as little as I ~ perhaps more than I.
They know enough to know
that we think it is worth wearing red,
listening to the story, singing
and eating cake together.

Long live the church!

Tui Bevin

October 2019 ~ One of the delightful innovations during Margaret's ministry at Opoho Church has been the quarterly, seasonal, late afternoon Children's Church services. There has been something particularly special about the Pentecost services.

Psalm for a Slowed-Down Advent

O God, I'm waiting...
I'm waiting to sing again
O Come, O Come Emmanuel...
that ancient Advent song
drawing me into such longing,
the confounding words
becoming stepping stones
for transcending the now.

Advent must be coming then,
our annual Antipodean Christmas countdown
full of excesses of spending and food
and feeling overwhelmed;
with too long to do lists,
and people weighed down
with expectations or memories
of people and Christmases long gone
or Christmases never had.

It's time, too, for Advent calendars.
God, I wonder what you would hide
behind the doors of an Advent calendar for me?
I suspect it might be words, something like:

Day 1 ~ Slow down ...
remember the end of time isn't here yet ~
it is only Advent, and Advent has a purpose,
and the purpose is to wait and prepare

Day 2 ~ Slow down ...
reflect on waiting
and the gifts waiting can bring

Day 3 ~ Slow down ...
reject excessive societal consumeristic practices
and create your own life-enhancing Advent practices

Day 4 ~ Slow down ...
rejoice in your southern Advent,
walk outside, sit under a tree or go to the beach
and ponder the insights of a summertime Advent

Day 5 ~ Slow down ...
remember my faithful servant
Julian of Norwich who said:
*All shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.*

I think I get the picture, God.
But the message was already there,
wasn't it, in the singing
of *O Come O Come Emmanuel*.

Ever-patient God,
we'll see how I get on this Advent,
after all, this is another chance
to work on how to experience the waiting!

O Come, O Come Emmanuel...

Tui Bevin

October 2018 ~ I realize how much I look forward to singing of O Come, O Come Emmanuel as Advent approaches. I also told a friend I was also thinking about Advent and waiting and expectations, and she wondered what options an Advent Calendar about waiting and expectations might have behind its doors for us. Then this Psalm just bubbled up while I was home one Saturday morning when Mark was at a church working bee.

Psalm of Blank Pages

Creator God,

the blank pages
of my coming year wait
empty, scary, hopeful

you are the God of new beginnings
you made all that is from nothing
you created the seasons

you sent Jesus as a baby
you forgive us our sins
you offer life everlasting

if only we would accept it
if only we would love and live
as you would have us do

how is it you stay hopeful for us
when we feel unworthy?

how is it we deserve still more
when we cannot see what we have?

how is it you do not give up on us
when we give up on ourselves?

Creator God,
I give thanks
for new beginnings

and pray that with your help
I will fill the pages of my year
with colour, joy and love

Amen

Tui Bevin

February 2019 ~ *I wrote this at the start of a new year when people I knew were beginning new courses of study, and I was wondering how my year would go too. The hope in new beginnings is such a curious yet important entity – how do we continue to be hopeful when we let ourselves down again and again?*

Tea & Croissants

If Jesus Christ had lived perhaps in a different place and time,
we might use tea and croissants now for our Eucharist lifeline.

We'd gather round a table still in community of faith
waiting while the hot tea brewed to serve to each one's taste.

He said we should remember Him by sharing drink and food,
but might we miss the point of it when rituals become skewed?

We invented rules meant to exclude and words to exclude too
and so God's grace is limited to the privileged too few.

It could be done with crisps and Coke or rice and warm green tea
this sharing of God's love for all and for you and me.

When I sit around a table now with some friends of mine
and share in tea and croissants then we touch on the divine.

Tui Bevin

*December 2017 ~ I often ponder about how ritualized Holy
Communion has become and what Jesus meant us to do when he
said, "Do this in remembrance of me".*

A Complex Communion

We come together
around our table:

Big G who's gluten-free
my friend who's vegan
some Presbyterian vegetarians,
omnivores and reducetarians,

there are calorie counters
and one who's diabetic
another's dyspeptic
on a low FODMAP diet.

We hold hands
give thanks
then explain
each dish.

I pray to myself
that within all this
dietary complexity
we can sustain
community.

Tui Bevin

July 2019 ~ This reflects my concerns about building community in this time of increasingly individualistic diets and lifestyles. It began in response to a pot luck dinner I had for my 60th birthday where there were five or six different dietary needs to consider.

A Psalm for All Seasons

Spring

Oh God, spring comes
imperceptibly, then unpredictably
days lengthen, earth warms
sensory overload, sneezing.

Season of new beginnings
colours and albatross return
daffodils cheer, ducklings waddle
season of [my own] birthing.

Time for fresh air, spring cleaning
planting, weeding
dreaming, planning
meanwhile the year flying by.

Creation relentlessly pulls us
full of faith in its own future;
season for growth and greening
bursting with hope.

I give thanks for spring.

Summer

Oh God, summer always comes
way before I'm ready
the year's work stretching out,
Christmas coming too soon.

Sunny antipodean Christmas
is right side up down here,
feasting and Christmas trees
Te Harinui and pohutukawa.

Luxuriant growth, strawberries
tomatoes, peas off the vine
bird song, insects galore
season of butterflies and monarchs.

Summer sand, surf, play, re-creation
time to enjoy sun, hide from sun
New Year, no meetings
time for reflection, refreshment.

I give thanks for summer.

Autumn

Oh God, autumn comes
pushing back summer playfulness:
days shorten, temperatures drop
growth falters, golden leaves fall.

or

Autumn: season of harvest
bounty for unknown future,
autumn births of mokopuna
foretelling golden curls.

Autumn: season of harvest
bounty for unknown future
preparations to stave off cold
nights lengthen, frosts come.

Nature slows, turns inwards,
essential decay and death:
laying down mulch
for eternal life.

Easter belongs to antipodean autumn
crossroads of life and death
crude cross, terrifying tomb:
death before life.

I give thanks for autumn.

Winter

Oh God, winter comes
whether I want it or not:
darkness, snow, floods
slips, icy roads, disruption;

stopping life as it was
until I work out it is time
to cosset the self
and germinate the spring.

Much as I dream of
snorkeling and cherries
winter demands its place
in the rhythm of life.

There is only one choice:
to become the winters ~
the winters of our weather
and the winters of my soul

I give thanks for winter.

Life Without End

there can be no spring without winter
there can be no winter without autumn
there can be no autumn without summer
there can be no summer without spring

the cycle of seasons beginning nowhere
ending nowhere, one after another
the seasons come spilling into each other
life without end, thanks be to God

Tui Bevin

July - August 2017 ~ I really enjoyed writing this and thinking about what the seasons mean to me as an antipodean and how they relate to each other. I wrote Winter on 24.7.17 after the worst rain, slips and floods around Dunedin since 1980.

Psalm of the Strawberry

Consider the strawberry:
it grows where it is planted
patient through winter bleakness
before bursting into summer's fullness
with tempting red berries
and shoots sent in all directions ~
their contribution to life everlasting.

Is that all that is required of us
to thrive where we are planted
allowing ourselves to be tended
and guided by the Great Gardener ~
our contribution to life everlasting?

Blessed be strawberries
and gardeners and jam makers
who give us glimpses of God
and of life everlasting.

Tui Bevin

March 2018 while at Aramoana ~ I made over 40 jars of jam this summer from the strawberries Mark tends in our garden so had lots of time this summer to think about strawberries.

Psalm of a Middling Christian

Oh God, Oh God

Those Psalmists of old
weren't namby pamby or PC
~ they sound like ancient drama queens
full of brazen honesty and hyperbole
... but I'm just a middling Christian

Those Psalmists of old
they sang of the earth quaking and judgment
and sin and warfare and righteous revenge
and destruction of their enemies
... but I'm just a middling Christian

Those Psalmists of old
they go on and on lamenting to you
raving about their misery and disappointments
as if you really are interested
in the minutiae of our wallowing
... but I'm just a middling Christian

And then, after all that
those Psalmists of old
exhort me to sing praises to you
with exclamation marks and shouting
and cymbals and arm waving and dancing
... but I'm just a middling Christian

Those psalmists of old
might be a hard act to follow,
but you have given each of us the gift of self
so if it fits in with your plans for me, Creator God
I'll do as the Psalmists exhort and sing a new song, a Tui song,
... even if I'm just a middling Christian

Thanks, be to God.

Tui Bevin

September 2018 ~ *I often find the sentiments in the Biblical psalms too extreme and hard to relate to, especially the lamenting and praising, so I challenged myself to write a lament about it.*

I also remembered Psalm 139 says I am fearfully and wonderfully made by God, and that gives me the right to a self, a place in the world, a voice ~ a voice to write Tui songs.

Middling: 1. of middle, medium, or moderate size, degree, or quality

2: mediocre, second-rate 3: of, relating to, or being a middle class

The Separateness of our Togetherness

Loving God, you call us to be a gathered people
we find many ways of being your people:

some worship openly, some can't
some want church buildings, some don't
some have inclusive leadership, some don't
some want Holy Communion every day, some never
some take a Lenten journey, some don't
some celebrate Easter, some don't
some celebrate Christmas, some don't
some hear your voice, some don't.

Loving God, you call us to be a gathered people;
we need your help:

help us live in community, not isolation
help us see commonalities, not differences
help us walk beside others, not ahead or behind
help us be the Good News, not another damning voice
help us prioritize the important, not the diversionary
help us hear your word, not what we want to hear
help us find cause to include, not exclude

Loving God, you call us to be a gathered people
you know everything there is to know about us:

so we pray for your help and guidance
that we may become the people
only you know we can be
to work together
to be the face of Christ in our world
in this time and place.

Thanks be to God

Tui Bevin

February 2018 ~ *The multitude of ways that Christians and churches have celebrated and organized themselves over time and different groups amaze me. And I can't help thinking that we should work with those differences, and not against them.*

The Gift of Music

Living and Loving Lord, Composer of all Creation

For 2000 years or more Moses and Miriam, David and the Psalmists,
the prophets and Paul have exhorted us to praise you
with singing and instruments and shouting for joy.

I give thanks for this gift of music
for the wonder of instruments that harmonize in beauty
for music that brings our tears and calms our fears
and for music that lifts our hearts and speaks to our souls

I give thanks for songs with words
for the songs on radio and in The Cloud that bring pleasure and
 companionship
for the joy of singing together to praise you
and for the Psalms of David that help us express who we are

I give thanks for musicians
for composers and conductors, instrumentalists and singers,
for music teachers, technicians and instrument makers
and for those who enhance our worship with music week by week

I give thanks for quiet
for the spaces between the notes that enable music to come alive
for knowing when it is best to make no sound and be silent
and for times of silence that restore our souls

I give thanks for the music of your creation:
the squawk of gulls, the swoosh of summer waves
the rustle of autumn leaves, the gentleness of lightly falling rain
the bleating of lambs and silence of sunrise

I give thanks for the stories that urge us to praise you with music,
the stories of Moses and Miriam, David and the Psalmists, the prophets
 and Paul

I give thanks too for all the unknown women and men that kept those
 stories alive

generation after generation so that we can hear you speaking to us
through them, urging us to make music and sing with joy

I confess there are times when I find it hard to make music and sing
and that sometimes I don't know how to sing
in this strange land of the 21st century.
I pray for your help.

I give thanks for the gift of music, Amen

Tui Bevin

25 March 2019 ~ Music is such an important part of our lives, our church life and our Bevin family life that I wanted to honour it. I love the Hasidic teaching "There are ten levels of prayer... above them is song".

A Litany of Lament, Thanksgiving and Hope

Let us pray. Merciful God:

We confess we live in a world with *abuse, bullying and consumerism;*
despair, ecological degradation & fake facts;

Lord, have mercy upon us

We confess we live in a world with *global warming, hunger and*
inequality; jealousy, killing fields and labeling;

Lord, have mercy upon us

We confess we live in a world with *military proliferation, nihilism and*
oppression; pollution, quackery and religious intolerance;

Lord, have mercy upon us

We confess we live in a world with *slavery, terrorism & unprecedented*
threats to creation; too many vulnerable, war and xenophobia;

Lord, have mercy upon us

We confess we live in a world with *youth underemployment and zillions*
of pieces of plastic and rubbish polluting our seas, land, air and
space;

Lord, have mercy upon us

Merciful Lord,
We confess we can be part of the problem,
living with insufficient thought
of You, others, our world or the future;

Lord, have mercy upon us

Generous God:

We give thanks for *artists, books and all creation;*
dreams and diversity, education and friendship;

Lord, our cup overflows

We give thanks for *generosity, health and inspiration;*
Jesus, kindness and love and laughter;

Lord, our cup overflows

We give thanks for *mentors, nature's bounty, and the oceans;*
pets and prayer, quirkiness and rainbows;

Lord, our cup overflows

We give thanks for *sunshine, thinking, and unconditional love;*
voting, water and xylophones;

Lord, our cup overflows

We give thanks for *youthfulness, zinnias*
and all the things that sustain us;

Lord, our cup overflows

Generous Lord, You are the source of all
and give us all we need and more.
Help us be grateful and give You thanks and praise.

Compassionate God:

We also pray for *aroa, bravery to speak out, and compassion;*
discernment, the earth, and forgiveness;

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for *generosity, hope and integrity;*
justice, Kiwi ingenuity and love;

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for *music making, neighbourliness and openness;*
peacemaking, questing and resourcefulness;

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for *shalom, thankfulness and unity;*
vision, wisdom and expansiveness;

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for *understanding of Your will for us, Your kingdom here on earth, and zeal for the road ahead;*

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord God, You are the alpha and omega,
before any beginning and beyond any ending.
You have given us all we need ~ and more.
Help us use what we have
to live each moment with the end in mind, Your end.

Lord, hear our prayers both spoken and unspoken

Amen

Tui Bevin

November 2018 ~ I wasn't happy with my first attempt at an acrostic psalm so thought I'd approach writing an alphabet acrostic psalm-prayer in a different way. This time it felt more natural to me than the first one I wrote.

The letters u-z were particularly challenging and it was these I revised, adding the letters that I had just left out the first time around because they had too few options and were too difficult to come up with something for.

I have discovered when writing poetry, that in writing in a particular form, such as this acrostic litany or having all lines starting with e.g. "w" (as I did once in a poem about Waitangi), forces me to dig deeper and come up with more ideas.

A Poem about Bathsheba

for Gisela

From our verandah
by the lagoon in Munda
every day we saw student nurses next door
lathering arms, washing hair, giggling
chatting with their friends
over low corrugated iron walls
surrounding a single tap.
Sitting on our verandah
one late afternoon George said,
Oh, what I can see, but I shall not see.

Perhaps Bathsheba did as so many have done
and bathed without drawing attention to a naked self.
Perhaps she didn't sit there fully exposed,
as Rembrandt painted her.

Yet dare I confess that for a moment
I want to imagine how it would feel
to be so desired ~ so desired
that I could capture a King
joining the lineage to birth the Messiah
and alter history forever.

If only we had a Book of Bathsheba
telling her story in her words.

Tui Bevin

August 2018 ~ I wrote this for Gisela Andrew as she asked me to write a poem about Bathsheba (that we were going to study the following month) when I was leaving the Daughters of Eve in July 2018. I've wanted to write about the scene on our Munda veranda in 1989 as I recall it so vividly and Bathsheba helped me. It is based on 2 Samuel 11-12.

A Psalm of Noadiah and Obadiah

Oh God, I've struggled with so much
in the Old Testament, there's more
violence, debauchery, treachery,
misogyny and militarism
than I'd ever want to know
in an eternity of lifetimes.
You know me ~ I don't go near
Hollywood blockbusters.

But we picked through the O.T. mayhem
finding gold like the Aaronic Blessing.
Then, towards the O.T's end
we came across a dozen people, all men,
tail-enders called minor prophets
a name that belittles their stories
as they spoke against exploitation and injustice,
stories needed to help us live well today.

And what about Deborah, Miriam, Huldah,
Noadiah or the prophetess with no name,
were they all really too minor to be minor?
Did not even one of the women prophets
warrant a book of their own, even if only
a one chapter book of 21 verses like Obadiah?
A half a sentence cannot tell us
if Noadiah was a woman ahead of her time
who challenged Nehemiah for Godly reasons.
or if she was a false prophet .

God of the Old Testament and every testament,
we need you in our 21st century world
of consumeristic complacency and fake news.

We need you to help us recognize and hear
today's visionaries and prophets,
men and women like Obadiah,
and perhaps even Noadiah,
who can see things how they are
and aren't too scared to tell the truth.

We need you to help us
to not turn our own backs
or run away, but to speak out
against exploitation and injustice.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Tui Bevin

*August 2018 ~ We were half way through the minor prophets at
Bible Book of Month and once again I'd been pondering about
prophets, and wondering where all the women prophets were.
Nehemiah 6: 14 & Obadiah 1: 1-21*

Dominion with Discretion: A Response to Psalm 8

I've often wondered:

what on earth were you thinking, God,
when you gave us dominion over the earth,
over the sheep, oxen and beasts of the field,
over the birds, and fish and all things in the sea
and over the land and seas and heavens
and all the things that you made with your hands?

What did you think we would do with this gift of dominion?
Did you hope we'd see the world
as being the work of your hands
and be like the psalmist and praise you
and care for the world as though it were a tender snowflake?

What has it been like to stand by and watch
as we've pushed the earth and atmosphere to its limits
plundering it and trashing it,
ignoring the warning signs of environmental disaster?
I apologize for my part. I lament. I cringe. I feel shame.
I weep and wail,
I worry about our way ahead.

Ever patient God,
make us worthy of the trust you've placed in us
We pray for your help to act with discretion
when we exercise our dominion
over this wonderful world you have made for us.

Amen

Tui Bevin

August 2019 ~ The idea of dominion over the animals and the earth has long challenged me about what it actually means. I struggle with all the negative news and forecasting about the ecological and environmental crisis, and also I feel that Christians should not have to take all the blame for having "dominion" over the earth. We need to find the hope in our stories.

A Response to Psalm 139

Oh Lord,
You formed me in my mother's womb

and the psalmists reminds us over and over
that your works are wonderful ~ so I must basically be okay.

I find that comforting, Lord, until it clicks
that you are like that with everyone:

You formed my non-neighbours in their mothers' wombs
You formed the people that I find it hard to like in their mothers' wombs

You formed my enemies in their mothers' wombs
(even though I prefer to believe I have no enemies).

All of them too are wonderfully made
everyone is loved by you, and okay, just as I am.

You formed us all in our mothers' wombs
You know all there is to know about everyone

and everyone else is no more
the centre of the universe than I.

You are.

Tui Bevin

August 2019 ~ Being wonderfully made by God is an image that has stuck with me, and I often ponder the ramifications of it. It is easier for me to think of my imperfections rather than being wonderfully made. I didn't expect this to end up where it did – you never know where writing a psalm will take you.

Seventeen

1.
the Lord shine on you
the Lord bless you and keep you
the Lord bring you peace
- *Numbers 6: 24-26*
2.
what is asked of us?
to walk humbly with our God
justice and mercy
- *Micah 6:8*
3.
the word was with God
the beginning was God's word
and the word was God
- *John 1:1*
4.
God guards me always
I lift mine eyes to the hills
but God is my strength
- *Psalms 121*
5.
we sit down and weep
can we sing the Lord's song here?
Oh Lord, hear our prayer
- *Psalms 137*
6.
there is none like you
you are wonderfully made
come, praise the Lord!
- *Psalms 139*
7.
praise God, sun and moon
mountains and hills, all that is
come, praise the Lord!
- *Psalms 148*
8.
all creation praise
all old and young together
come, praise the Lord
- *Psalms 148*

9.

how easy it is
sing for joy even in bed!
sing Hallelujah!

- *Psalm 149*

10.

come, praise the Lord!
sing to the Lord a new song
dance and make music

- *Psalm 149*

11.

love delights in truth
love is patient, love is kind
love never fails

- *Corinthians 13: 4-8*

12.

God wants all things right
God tests Adam's unruly brood
God is eternal

- *Ps 11 (The Message)*

13.

choose God or money
no-one can serve two masters
what is it to be?

- *Matthew 6: 24*

14.

welcome the strangers
feed them, shelter them, rejoice!
they may be angels

- *Hebrews 13:2*

15.

faith, hope, love abide
the greatest of these is love
love never ends

- *1 Corinthians 13: 8-13*

16.

a child will be born
Mighty God, Prince of Peace
God with us, for us!

- *Isaiah 9*

17.

come, follow Jesus
deny yourself, take up the cross
lose life to find it

- Matthew 16: 24-25

Tui Bevin

9 March 2019 ~ I wrote this after thinking about making the church garden into a Haiku Garden and what haiku-style poems or psalms might be worthy of inclusion.

It was a fun challenge to create these 17 haiku-style poems (at least in a succinctness and syllabic sense) of mostly five, seven and five syllable lines.

A Psalm of Thanks for Words

O God,
God of the Word and all words.
You brought everything into being
through your words;
we are people of the Word.

I give thanks for words:
the written word
the spoken word
the living Word;

words carefully written
words faithfully retold
words copied, translated
words deciphered, debated
and meaning discerned.

I give thanks for the way
children and adults learn words
and for the ability of words
to build us up and connect us.

I give thanks for the times
when there are no words.

Save us from
words that harm
words that alienate
and the tyranny of big words
that obfuscate and exclude.

Help us, O God,
to only use thought-full words
to avoid thought-less words.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ
the living Word

Amen.

Tui Bevin

23 March 2018 in Auckland ~ *Words fascinate me. I love their mystery (John 1:1) and how using them we can communicate with one another about everything humankind has ever known.*

The Call

Surely it's time, Lord,
to reclaim this idea of a call
as being for any and all of us
and not just the clerically inclined

It certainly stands out in the Bible
where You've spoken to people -
but most of us aren't Moses or Job
Ezekiel or Elijah, Samuel or Saul

I've never heard Your voice
as clear as a PA announcement
in the concert hall or airport,
but then I don't expect to.

You are more creative
than simply having one way
of getting through to us
(since we can be slow learners)

You also speak to us
through dreams and visions,
angels and prophets
circumstances and serendipity

music and miracles
creation and people,
hunches and tugs
and the needs of the world.

And so, Loving God, I pray
that I may be open to You
and figure out and live out my call.
This is my prayer.

Amen

Tui Bevin

September 2019 ~ *This issue has concerned me for many years and it was good to gather my thoughts and write this. I presume I needed to claim some validity for those of us who haven't "been called" to ordained ministry nor have heard God speaking clearly in words but are aware of the other ways we hear God's voice. Joan Chittister's writings about our call have been an important influence and encouragement for me.*

The Sound of Ten Thousand Silent Cell Phones *a lament*

Loving God
God of life, love and lamentations
You hear our prayers
You bear our burdens

The sun is shining
birds are singing
my cupboards are overflowing
yet I feel like crying

loss, mourning, busyness
and then the mosque massacres
my stuffing gone
tears fill my eyes

I hold on to the hope
I heard in the sound
of ten thousand
silent cell phones

as we marched in silence
against white supremacy

we marched for peace and aroha
here in Aotearoa

O Lord hear my prayer

Tui Bevin

23 March 2019 ~ I wrote this after walking on the silent march of the University of Otago staff, students, alumni, and friends on 21 March to support the Muslim community after the mosque shootings in Christchurch. I walked with friends from Opoho Church.

The Hospitality of Abraham

Oh God,
the unthinkable happened
one man on a shooting spree
in mosques, in New Zealand, in Christchurch
killing fifty people,
maiming many
while they prayed.

But God,
when time has moved on,
and victims have been named and buried
and the time for flowers and vigils will be past,
what then can we do to make a difference?
What can I do?

When I think about it, God,
haven't you already tried to show us what to do
through the Abraham who unites us all
Jew, Christian and Muslim;
Abraham who entertained angels without knowing it?
You taught us to offer hospitality to the stranger
food and shelter and friendship
safety from danger.

What about it, God?
On the one hand
it seems another of your crazy ideas,
on the other
what have we got to lose?

What might we gain if we learn the names
of neighbours and strangers
and break bread with them
and learn their stories?

God of Abraham and Moses,
we pray for your help
to love our neighbour
in a way that we never have before
God of Abraham and Moses
We pray for your help.

Tui Bevin

21 March 2019 ~ I wrote this after the 15 March Mosque Massacre in Christchurch.

The story of Abraham showing hospitality to angels without knowing it is in Genesis 18.

The Moderator of PCANZ, the Right Rev Fakaofu Kaio, wrote a response to the Christchurch tragedy that included “There is strength [in] diversity, and many of us will have neighbours who are different to ourselves. We need to learn their names, break bread with them, and work to understand their values and their faith, because this how the hatred and fear that breeds such violence will be eliminated...”

Psalm Writing Group's Psalm

Psalm of Lament and Petition

In you O Lord, we put our trust. Make known to us your ways.

In the words of the psalmists of old:

‘What did we do to deserve this?’

‘Why do you leave us at the mercy of those who wish to demolish us?’

‘Do you leave us alone to face the naysayers and the doomsayers?’

Some might say an over the top response to the Epistle of January 2019 yet we throb with the same despair for it seems that God is absent from this missive that the church with its millenniums of wisdom and its valuing of learning is trampled on for the sake of *we know not what*

our trust is broken with this hasty, unexpected, unPrebyterian bombshell
our passion for education as a reformed and reforming body of Christ is made a mockery
our wonder and hope is in the rising of the voice of the faithful who cry out ‘enough!’

Holy God, hear the pain of your people
speak into the hearts of those who would sweep away our heritage, our learning, our very being
continue to make Jesus Christ known through
our wise doctors of faith
our well formed ministers of word and sacrament
our congregations who delight in thinking, growing and serving

God of all time: our past, our now, our future ~ hear our prayer

In Jesus name
Amen.

Opoho Church Psalm Writing Group

27 February 2019 ~ Written in response to the Review of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership and the Presbyterian Research Centre, Pre-Change Proposal dated 29 January 2019, and this was part of Opoho Church’s feedback on the proposal.