

On Top of the World: Choosing Life in Creationtide

Deuteronomy 30:15–end; Luke 14:25–33

Preached at Sawston, 7th September 2025

Deuteronomy 30.15-end

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, ‘Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of all our hearts
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord our God. Amen.

We’ve just heard two stark challenges.

From Moses: *“I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life.”*

From Jesus: *“Count the cost of discipleship.”*

And into that I want to weave a third voice. Not from Scripture, but from the 1970s. Some of you will know this song, some of you may have danced to it, and some may groan at the memory.

*Such a feelin's comin' over me
There is wonder in most every thing I see
Not a cloud in the sky, got the sun in my eyes
And I won't be surprised if it's a dream*

*Everything I want the world to be
Is now comin' true especially for me
And the reason is clear, it's because you are here
You're the nearest thing to heaven that I've seen*

*I'm on the top of the world lookin' down on creation
And the only explanation I can find
Is the love that I've found, ever since you've been around
Your love's put me at the top of the world*

*Something in the wind has learned my name
And it's tellin' me that things are not the same
In the leaves on the trees, and the touch of the breeze
There's a pleasing sense of happiness for me ...*

It's the Carpenters' *Top of the World*.

On one level it's a simple love song - the world looks different because of love. But on another level, it resonates surprisingly well with where the Church is today.

This Sunday we begin the season of *Creationtide* - a time to rediscover the world not as backdrop or stage scenery, but as gift.

Creationtide is the Church's way of saying: stop, look, pay attention. To see the sky and say "*thank you.*" To see the harvest and say "*gift, not entitlement*". To see the fragile balance of our climate and realise *this matters spiritually, not*

just politically. That pop lyric, without meaning to, hints at a profound truth: joy is found not in escaping the world but in seeing it differently.

Let's dive into the Old Testament reading today: Deuteronomy – Covenant and Choice

Moses is not giving the people bland moral advice, like a wise parent saying “eat your vegetables.” He is standing at a decisive moment. The people of Israel are on the edge of the Promised Land, about to enter and take possession, and Moses knows the dangers.

So he says: *“I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life.”*

“Choose life” is not just about personal goodness. It’s about how the people live together in God’s land. To choose life means to live gratefully within creation’s limits: to remember the land, the harvest, the air and the rain as God’s gift. To choose death is to forget - to exploit, to seize the land as possession rather than gift. This isn’t abstract. It’s ecological. Moses says, in effect: your faithfulness will be visible in how you treat the land, in how you honour creation as gift. Forget that, and you may survive for a while, but you will not flourish.

We need to hear that, because we live in a moment when humanity has too often chosen death - by overusing resources, polluting seas, warming the planet. Moses’ ancient words cut into our present moment with sharp urgency: *Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.*

Luke – Radical Commitment

Then Jesus takes it further. His words are shocking:

*“Unless you hate father and mother...
unless you give up possessions,
you cannot be my disciple.”*

“Hate” here doesn’t mean bitterness or cruelty. It’s a Hebrew way of speaking - to love one thing more, you describe loving another less. In other words, Jesus is saying: every loyalty, even the most cherished ones, has to be re-ordered around him.

And then come the images:

- The builder who counts the bricks before laying the foundations.
- The king who measures his forces before battle.

Let's be clear though, Jesus isn't saying "don't follow me." He is saying: "*know what it means*". This is not 'cheap grace'. Discipleship is costly. To follow him is to let him shape our priorities, our relationships, our possessions, even our identity. This is not discipleship as sentiment. It is discipleship as decision.

From Lyric to Gospel

Now the Carpenters' lyric seems a long way from this. *Top of the World* is effortless joy; Luke's words are weighty.

But they meet in Christ because joy that lasts - joy not just for when the sun is shining, not just for when life is easy - that kind of joy needs depth.

Moses shows us how to build our lives on God's promises, to stay grounded in him; and Jesus shows us what it costs → cross-shaped discipleship.

Together they open into the joy of resurrection.

The pop lyric gives us a glimpse: the world transformed by love.

Christ gives us the reality: the world transformed by **God's** love, even through death into life.

Creationtide – Spiritual and Ethical Dimensions

This is why Creationtide matters. It insists that joy is not an abstract feeling; it is located here, in this world God has made.

- **Spiritually:** Creationtide is a summons to pray with eyes open. To see sunrise and harvest, to hear birdsong and rainfall, as 'sacraments' of God's generosity. To realise that worship doesn't end when we leave church; it continues when we step outside and pay attention to God's handiwork.
- **Ethically:** Creationtide is a summons to live faithfully, recognising that decisions about energy, transport, food, waste are not just lifestyle

choices but spiritual ones. To consume carelessly is to choose death. To live attentively, thankfully, is to choose life.

So yes, the Carpenters may never have imagined their song as 'theology', but in God's providence, their lyric can become almost a prayer:

*"Help me to see creation as gift, Lord.
Help me to delight in your world.
Help me to choose life."*

Christ at the Centre

Oh yes - we cannot stop with Moses, or with ethical living. The centre of it all is Christ. He is the one who *chose life* in its fullest sense; entering creation, becoming flesh and blood. He is the one who *counted the cost*; bearing the cross.

And through his resurrection, he opens new creation, where joy is no longer fleeting but eternal.

Choosing Life Today

- Personal discipleship: Choosing life means ordering our days with thanksgiving, receiving every gift as grace and offering it back to God, practising honesty when it costs, generosity when it hurts, and prayer when it feels hard.
- Ecological discipleship: Choosing life means aligning lifestyle with faith, resisting waste, reducing consumption, treasuring what we have, and remembering that creation is gift, not possession.
- Communal discipleship: Choosing life means bearing the cost of hospitality, justice, advocacy. It means asking not only, "*what works for me?*" but "*what serves the common good?*"

These are not optional extras. They are the very shape of life in Christ.

So when that melody runs in your mind this week:

“I’m on the top of the world, lookin’ down on creation...”

... let it remind you of more than a pop lyric.

Let it remind you that joy and gratitude are the fruit of living in God’s promises. That discipleship is costly, not casual. And that in Christ crucified and risen, creation itself is lifted into God’s joy.

Amen.