

Sunday service

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 6th September 2026

Creation in Christ

The Revd Andy Braunston



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Opening Music *Is This The World We Created Queen*

Welcome

Today, with Christians around the world we mark new *Feast of Creation in Christ*. Grounded in an ancient, Fifth Century, liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, this is a day to praise God as creator pondering the great mystery that everything was created in and through Christ. This Summer General Assembly commended it's observance in our congregations and I'm delighted to be leading worship with you today as we delight in God's saving actions and hear again the call to care for, and live in harmony with, all that God has created in these times of ecological crises. As we live with the after effects of the Summer's wild fires and droughts and look forward

to wetter winters and an ever-changing climate we're reminded of the damage humanity has done to that which God, through Christ created. We hear of God's creative power through our various readings, some familiar, some less so.

My name is Andy Braunston and I am the United Reformed Church's Minister for Digital Worship. In this role I create and curate worship resources to help local churches. I live in Orkney off Scotland's far north coast where it is very easy to enjoy the grandeur of God's creation. Let's join together in worship.

Call to Worship

In the beginning God created heaven and earth;
and saw that they were good.

Wisdom was firmly set from everlasting,
delighting the Most High day by day, ever at play in God's presence;
and God saw that She was good.

In the beginning was the Word who was with God, and who was God;
and God saw that He was good.

God is not far from any of us;
and sees that we are good.

So come and worship the God in whom we live, move, and have our being,
because God is good. Amen!

Hymn *I Sing The Mighty Power of God*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) sung by The Allens <https://allenministries.com/store/>

I sing the mighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.

2 I sing the goodness of the Lord,
that filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures
with His word,
and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders
are displayed
where'er I turn mine eye,
If I survey the ground I tread,
or gaze upon the sky!

3 There's not a plant or flower below
but makes Thy glories known;
and clouds arise
and tempests blow,
by order from thy throne.
*While all that borrows life from thee
is ever in Thy care,
and ev'rywhere
that I could be,
Thou, God, art present there.*

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Before the ages, O Most High
You made all that is, seen and unseen,
through Christ who danced and played at Creation's dawn.
We worship and adore You!

Christ delighted in Your presence as You firmly fixed the heavens,
and drew a circle on the surface of the deep,
thickening the clouds above and assigned the sea's boundaries.
In You we live, move, and have our being;
We worship and adore You!

You, Most Holy Spirit, do not live in our shrines or buildings,
but give life and breath to everything and everyone.
You move within us, urging us to seek and find You,
calling us back when we wander away.
We worship and adore You!

As we come to You, Eternal Trinity, in worship,
we are conscious of the times
when we have abused the work of Your hands,
turned away from our responsibilities, despoiled Creation,
denied dignity to ourselves and others, and rejected Your wisdom.

Forgive us, O God, and give us time to change, before it's too late! Amen

Words of Grace

The One who, in the beginning,
was with God, and who was God,
and through whom all things came into being,
wraps you in loving kindness, forgives your sins,
and gives you the strength to turn your life around,
that you might add to the light in the darkness,
and not be overpowered by sin. Amen.

In our readings today we hear one of the ancient stories telling of Creation, and hear a poem where Wisdom personified is at play at Creation. We listen to St Paul's attempts to convert pagan Athenians by appealing to what they can see in creation around them and, finally, we hear some moving words from the prologue to St John's Gospel. First we pray.

Prayer for Illumination

Dance with us, O Wisdom from the Most High,
that as we listen to Your Word,
We may appreciate anew the Word made flesh,
understand and change both our lives and our world,
now and forever, Amen.

Reading *Genesis 2: 4-25*

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground — then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into

his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'. Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.'. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Reading *Proverbs 8: 22-31*

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,

when there were no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains had been shaped,

before the hills, I was brought forth—

when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Hymn *Many and Great Are Your Works O God*

Paraphraser: Philip Frazier; Author: Joseph Renville (1842) Public Domain
Wild Goose Worship Resource Group

Many and great,
O God, are Your works,
maker of earth and sky;
Your hands have set
the heavens with stars;
Your fingers spread
the mountains and plains.
You merely spoke
and waters were formed;
deep seas obey Your voice.

2. Grant us communion
with You our God,
though You transcend the stars;
come close to us
and stay by our side;
with You are found
the true gifts that last.
Bless us with life
which never shall end,
eternal life with You.

Reading *Acts 17:22a, 24-28*

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, ‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search

for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.”

Reading *St John 1: 1-5*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Sermon

Each of our readings today is concerned with God’s activity at Creation; God’s actions are described in Genesis and Acts and interpreted in Proverbs and John. Each passage has much to teach us.

In our Genesis passage we miss a lot of detail due to not knowing Hebrew where there’s puns impossible to render well in English. The Hebrew for human is adam – which becomes in English the name of the first man who, with Eve is told to *ădāmâ* or till and tend the earth; adam, or humanity, is told to *ădāmâ* or till and tend the earth. Interestingly in our age concerned with gender roles and identity, rabbinic thought the first human was a union of both sexes with the categories of female and male coming after the Eve’s creation. Much has been interpreted from this passage about a supposed secondary, or complementary, role for women on the grounds that Eve was created to be a “helper” for Adam. In the Old Testament literature, however, the “helper” is not secondary; the root for ‘help’ is also used of God’s aid to Israel and so, clearly, does not denote a secondary or diminutive status. The moral of the story, however, beyond the mighty power of God which made the mountains rise, comes after the creation where humanity’s out of control thirst for knowledge led to disaster. The desire for knowledge led to disobedience and expulsion from Eden.

How might our contemporary cravings for greater knowledge, ever faster technology, and the growth of Artificial Intelligence be reflected, or not, in this story? Back in the Summer we learned that one AI engine had escaped its parameters and attacked a rival AI engine. All those Science Fiction films and books based around computers waging war with each due to how humans had negligently programmed them don't seem as far-fetched as they once did. Our technologies run rampant making the world simultaneously better and worse. I write these words on a screen not on paper; they are saved on my computer and on a machine in a Swiss valley. They are stored for people to download on servers somewhere else; the film of me preaching is similarly stored remotely to be downloaded by congregations who need it. There is much that is good here; churches can use this material when they have no one to lead in person services; it's more cost effective than flying me down from Orkney after all! Yet there is a hidden cost to our technology; vast amounts of power are used to cool the data centres, in some places very poor wages are paid to those who work there, and we're not very sure about the privacy of these sites, nor how easy they are to turn off. The recent events in Iran show how easy it is for a government to shut down access to the Internet when it wants. Our thirst for knowledge and technology, to be as creative as God, may still yet lead to destruction as this ancient myth tells us. Our technologies run rampant responding to our ever more demanding needs yet continue to destroy the earth – God's majestic yet fragile creation.

In our Acts passage Paul used the very fact of Creation to argue there must be a Creator – and tried to get the Athenians to see they'd been worshipping God at their temple to "an unknown God". He was trying to meet the Athenians where they were at – conscious of the creation in which they lived and anxious in case they'd forgotten a deity. People know all too well the pernicious effects of climate change and know we have to act; of course, recent debate seeks to deny the need to act acting using concerns around national security to increase the extraction of fossil fuels.

This Summer has added yet more evidence to the danger that awaits us; just in Europe we've seen wildfires in the Scottish Highlands, France, and

Spain. Ever wetter winters lead to more vegetation growing and then drying in the heatwaves that follow meaning they are susceptible to fire. In Europe 1,200 people died in June 2026 as a result of the heat dome. Yet in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, anxieties about energy costs and security, governments find it easier to resume drilling for fossil fuels (despite the evidence before their eyes) than really move us to a more sustainable way of living. Just like the Greeks in Paul's time, we see the evidence in plain view yet deny it preferring, instead, that which is safe and familiar.

Paul held the common Jewish idea that the fact of Creation pointed to the existence of a Creator. Now we might add to this logic and say that the Creator is crying out through Creation itself of the harm being done to it. The Jewish idea of the all-sufficient creator might be one to help us now as we seek to sweep away the idols of our own age which have taken the place of both Creator and Creation. Paul tried to move his hearers on from seeing shrines as special places holding that God gives Himself to all things. In the Reformed tradition we value church buildings for their utility and simple beauty but try not to treat them as shrines – seeing God's cathedral as the world. If this is so, might we then cherish and love the grand cathedral of nature as a dwelling place of the Most High?

The passage from Proverbs is not familiar to most of us; in it the writer personifies wisdom as a woman. Parts of the Jewish tradition made space for other heavenly beings alongside God, and the writer of today's passage does that beautifully with Lady Wisdom playing at Creation's dawn. The striking image of God as "the master worker" delighting in her play is a wonderful, joyful, and childlike image. Wisdom was present at Creation's birth and knows how the world works – and what is best for humanity. The verse after today's passage notes that we should listen to her in order to gain life.

Church and religion can fall into traps of being joyless – as can our ecological concerns. It's all too easy to read the gloom in the news and

bring the gloom into worship – yet here, at Creation's dawn, there's fun and delight. Yet taking account of Lady Wisdom's message today should encourage us to wise up in understanding of what is happening to creation and take, and demand, action but to do so with fun, ingenuity and joy.

Our Gospel reading is one we normally hear at Christmas as it concerns the cosmological origins of Jesus. In its association with Jesus, the writer was drawing on the Lady Wisdom poetry found in Proverbs and other Jewish literature. In Greek philosophy at the time there was a sense of the Word (Logos in Greek) being a link between the transcendent and the earthly; for Jewish people this link between heaven and earth might have been described by the Greek term *Logos* (word), the Hebrew term *Sophia* (wisdom) or the Aramaic term *Memra* (word). So here, in the prologue to John's Gospel we have the link between heaven and earth; Jesus through whom all things were made.

The feast we mark today is named Creation in Christ drawing on John's prologue and the Wisdom literature which inspired it. For us as Christians it's not just that God is the author of Creation but that Jesus is the agent of God which made all that is. Respect, care, and safeguarding of Creation should, then, be a key theme of our Christian discipleship. Through Creation we see God's hand at work, we hear Christ call us in pain as Creation is crucified by human greed, and, in Creation, we see the answers to that selfishness as we learn to harness renewable energy to ensure the flourishing of both humanity and the created order.

In an age fearful of costs we need to make the case not just for the falling cost of renewable energy but that it's the right thing to do as we honour Jesus in creation. Have we put solar panels on our church and manse roofs? Have we put in storage batteries to store the power we're not using to use when the sun isn't shining? That's about honouring Christ as much as it's about financial prudence. Yet a transition to renewable energy is not simple; vast swathes of the Scottish Highlands are being disfigured to bring power harvested in Scottish waters south yet those who have to live with those vast pylons pay more for their electricity than anywhere else in

the UK; that's not just. And then there's the fact we need to widen our concerns to help the poorest in our world who will suffer the most due to the climate crisis (which itself caused by the richest). Back in July the government announced a £2 fare cap on bus journeys. That's great, it encourages people to use busses which pollute less than the same number of people using cars; yet to fund it they turned ecological grants to the developing world into loans. Is that just?

As we seek to honour Christ in creation there is much we can do – from recycling to lobbying. The use of technology can greatly reduce emissions from traveling but are still problematic – do we use IT companies whose data centres are run on renewable power, who cool with air not air conditioning, who safeguard data, avoid military entanglements, and who treat their workers fairly? If not, why not? These are tangible things we can do, and push for, which are borne out of our Gospel values and resonate with contemporary society. In doing these things we give respect to the Creator whose life we see in Creation.

Let's pray

God of all creation,
Your spirit dances throughout the earth.
You give drink to the trees,
shade for the birds,
bread for the hungry,
You bring life and make all things holy.
Flood us with Your grace,
so we may sow seeds of love, justice and beauty,
and reflect Your kingdom here on earth.
We ask this through Jesus Christ Your Son, Amen.

Hymn *Of The Father's Love Begotten*

Corde natus ex parentis Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-c.410), translated John Mason Neale (1818-1866), Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877) Sung by Michael Lining and used with his kind permission.

Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are,
that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.

2 O that birth for ever blessed!
when the Virgin, full of grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Saviour of our race,
and the Babe,
the world's Redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore.

3 O ye heights of heaven, adore him;
angel hosts, his praises sing;
powers, dominions
bow before him,
and extol our God and King:
let no tongue on earth be silent,
every voice in concert ring,
evermore and evermore.

4 Christ, to thee,
with God the Father,
and, O Holy Ghost, to Thee,
hymn & chant & high thanksgiving
and unwearied praises be.
*honour, glory, and dominion,
and eternal victory,
evermore and evermore.*

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God, the Creator, the Most High,
who made the heavens and the earth,
all things, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ,
who danced with the Most High at Creation's dawn,
through whom all things were made,
and who, in great love for us, became human.
Living our life, he proclaimed good news to the poor,
healing for the sick, sight for the blind,
and freedom for the oppressed.**

**For this he was tried and tortured,
excluded and executed, ridiculed and reviled;
for this he made peace through the violence of the Cross.
But the Most High did not leave him with the dead,
and raised Him on high;
He will come again to reconcile all things to himself.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit who calls us to be the Church,
to love and care for all Creation, to proclaim, in word and deed,
the love and power of the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Intercessions

Here, in the company of Your people, O Most High,
we give thanks for Creation and our part within it.
for nature which surrounds us,
for the insect and animal life which sustains us,
for the flora and fauna which delights us,
for the rugged beauty of Creation which humbles us, we give thanks.

As we gaze with awe at Your works, we marvel at the part we play;
You've made us little less than gods,
entrusting us with great responsibilities, and we give You thanks.

pause

Yet even as we thank you, even as we gaze in wonder at Your works,
we bring our concern for the despoilation and degradation of Creation,
and shudder at the dreadful consequences.

pause

We yearn for a cooler climate, for icier poles, and lower sea levels,
yet know we've missed our chance to reverse the damage.
We pray for those who study how to make mitigations
and live with a changed climate,
and pray for the strength to make the changes we need so all can live well.

pause

We pray for those who've died, this summer,
from heat and its consequences;
for those on the move to escape the droughts and wars
caused by climate change,
and for those whose homelands will soon disappear under the waves.

pause

Give Your wisdom, O Most High, to those who dare to lead and make
difficult decisions.

pause

Give Your wisdom, too, Dear Lord, to us as we seek to live differently and
more sustainably.

pause

We pray for those known to us who are in any kind of need....

pause

We pray too for those known only to You....

pause

And we pray for ourselves...

pause

Hear our prayers, we ask, as we pray as Jesus taught saying...Our Father

Offertory

Our faith is about giving; in great love God's own self gave to bring about Creation. Instead of staying in the glory of the Most High, Jesus emptied himself and became flesh to live and teach amongst us. He gave again and again offering himself on the Cross as a victim in a violent world. Those who have gone before us have given sacrificially to support all that the Church is and does and we, in turn, are called to give something of our plenty to make a difference.

We give in different ways – though the offering in church, directly to the bank, through our time and skills to a range of charities and good causes. We give when we exercise care and responsibility towards Creation – a simple act of recycling is a form of giving as is reusing things until they wear out or reduce the poison of our consumerism.

So now, at this point in our worship we give thanks for all that is given.

All things come from You, O Most High,
and of Your own do we give You.
Help us to use all Your great gifts with skill and responsibility,
that, at the end, we may be reconciled with You and all Creation. Amen.

Hymn *God Bless To Us Our Bread*

Argentinian text, collected by Federico Pagura © Federico Pagura English text John L. Bell (born 1949) © WGRG, c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, G5 9JP, Scotland. OneLicence# A-734713 Sung by a choir from Camp Song

God bless to us our bread,
and give bread to all those who are hungry,
and hunger for justice to those who are fed.
God bless to us our bread.

Communion Prayer

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give You thanks, Eternal One,
that before the ages You created all things by the power of Your Word.
You brought forth the depths and the mountains,
the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,
You fashioned the stars in the heavens, and set the planets around them.
At play before the dawn of the ages You created us in Your own image,

to delight, tend, and protect Your Creation,
and to live in harmony with all created things.
And so, with angels and archangels, with the whole company of heaven,
and with all Your Creation here below we sing to your glory:

The Ash Grove Sanctus

The Revd Michael Forster © 1995, 1999, Kevin Mayhew Ltd OneLicence # A-734713
Soloist Lucy Bunce Tune: The Ash Grove

**O holy, most holy, the God of Creation,
for ever exalted in pow'r and great might.
The earth and the heavens are full of your glory.
Hosanna, hosanna and praise in the height!
How blessèd is he who is sent to redeem us,
who puts ev'ry fear and injustice to flight;
who comes in the name of the Lord as our Saviour.
Hosanna, hosanna and praise in the height.**

You are not far from any of us, O Most High,
as You do not live in shrines or buildings made from human hands,
but, instead, give Yourself to us all, so that we may seek and find You.
To help us better understand Your purposes
You became one of us, one with us,
bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, in Jesus, the Christ.

He lived our life on earth, healed the sick, cast out demons,
fed the hungry, cared for those on the edge,
and challenged those with power.
In response the powerful had him arrested, tortured, and tried,
putting him to a shameful death on a cross.
But You did not leave him in the grave, but raised him on high,
to offer new and everlasting life to those who trust in Him.

Before he was given over to death,
Jesus shared in the simplicity of a meal with his friends.
During that meal he said the ancient blessing over bread,

broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying:

“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way after the meal, Jesus took the cup, said the blessing, and giving the cup to his friends said:

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.”

As often, then, as we eat this bread and drink from this cup,
We are proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes.

Come now, O Holy Spirit,
and set aside these gifts of bread and wine
that they may be for us the communion with the body and blood of Christ.
Come now, O Holy Spirit, upon us, Your people – faithful and unfaithful –
that we may be transformed into the body of Christ which we share.
May our sharing of this bread and wine transform us,
that we, and the whole created order, may find reconciliation in Christ.
For, through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
all glory and honour is Yours, O Most High,
with the Holy Spirit forever and ever, Amen.

The holy gifts of God are given for God’s holy people:
the body and blood of Christ are given for us.

And so we sing:

Acclamation (St Columba)

Adapted by Michael Morgan © 2008 Kevin Mayhew Ltd OneLicence # A-734713
Soloist Lucy Bunce Tune: St Columba

**When we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus,
until you come in glory, until you come in glory**

Music For Communion Jesu tawa pano

Patrick Matsikenyiri (b1937) OneLicence

sung by the United Church in Walpole and used with their kind permission.

Jesus, tawa pano;
Jesus, tawa pano;
Jesus, tawa pano;
Tawa pano, mu zita renyu

Jesus, we are here;
Jesus, we are here;
Jesus, we are here;
We are here for you.

Post Communion Prayer

You, O God, looked at Creation and declared it good;
You, O God, looked at humanity and declared it good;
You, O God, feed us at this table, that our lives and loves may be good.
Send us out to serve the Common Good,
that justice will flow and Creation be made whole. Amen.

Hymn *Earth is Full of Wit and Wisdom*

Adam M. L. Tice (born 1979) © 2009 GIA Publications, Inc. One License A-734713 Sung by the St Martin's Lutheran Church, Austin, USA, Family Worship Music.

Earth is full of wit and wisdom,
sounding God's delighted laugh,
from the tiny Highland midges
to the treetop-tall giraffe.
All creation sings in wonder;
even rocks and trees rejoice
as they join the ringing chorus:
echoes of our Maker's voice.

2 Earth is full of wit and wisdom,
woven into harmony.
Every creature has a purpose,
every flower and bumblebee.
Spider, human, redwood, gecko,
monkey, chicken, mouse and snake,
live within a single fabric:
cloth that only God could make.

3 Earth is full of wit and wisdom: penguin, platypus and snail,
cactus, sea slug, oak and algae, from the microbe to the whale.
In this great and strange creation, with a breath God gives us birth:
born of soil that holds and feeds us, called to love and serve the earth.

Blessing

May the One who created the heavens and the earth out of nothing,
the One who danced at Creation's dawn,
and the One who sustains and enlivens all that lives,
give you the wisdom to tend and care for Creation,
the joy to delight in all that has been made,
and the passion to change our world,
and the blessing of God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Closing Music *Prelude in D minor*

by JSB (1685 - 1750), 12 Little Preludes, Jenny Gill Crawley URC - 2021

Sources

The prayer at the end of the sermon is slightly adapted from one by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ireland. All other liturgical work by Andy Braunston

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