

REFORMATION  
SUNDAY

Special

Weekly  
Manna

31 Oct 2021 Issue

66

## Saved through faith

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV





## Today's Question

How can I participate in building the reign of God in the world today?

# Reflection

Scripture reading: Ruth 1:1-18, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:11-14; Gospel: Mark 12:28-34

## Declare Your Courage

—Henri J. M. Nouwen with Nathan Ball, *A Spirituality of Fundraising: Workbook Edition* (Upper Room Books, 2019)

### PRAYER of the week

Creator God,  
Give me  
vision and  
mission, so  
that I may  
find new life  
and direction.  
Amen.



I recently attended a church service where several adults were baptized. As part of this ritual, each one of them was asked to affirm his or her choice to be baptized by declaring several sentences that included the words, “I declare my courage to participate in the building of the reign of God that is in the world and in me.” These words moved me deeply. In that moment, I felt compelled to declare my own courage to participate in building the reign of God in the world.





# HOW CAN I FIND A GRACIOUS GOD?

by Bernd Oberdorfer

## **PARADISE REDISCOVERED: Luther's discovery of the free gift of righteousness**

In 1545, the year before his death, Martin Luther returned to past events that had turned him into the Reformer that he had become. Reading his report, we can sense the strong emotions that continued to move him, even after thirty years had passed. He wrote how repeatedly he came across the term “God’s righteousness,” and how he “hated” it. He had thought that it meant the righteousness with which God judged and punished.

Luther became a monk because he took God’s commandments particularly seriously, which meant that he felt that he could never do everything right for God. Despite all his efforts, he continued to feel like a sinner and feared God’s wrath. He saw Christ not as a savior but a severe judge, who convicted him for good reason.

**SALVATION  
- NOT FOR  
SALE**



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However, soon he came to understand the phrase “God’s righteousness” in an entirely new way, namely, as the righteousness that God grants us, although we do not deserve it, the righteousness that God allows us to share in freely, i.e., by grace alone and without us having to do anything for it. “I had the feeling,” he would write later, “that I was born again and entered into paradise through opened doors.”

This joyous experience is the very core of Luther’s theology, and would become the driving impulse for the entire Reformation. Luther’s desperate question, How can I find a gracious God?—what can and must I do for my salvation? —was answered with the promise of redemption: We cannot and do not have to do anything for our salvation as God has already given us everything that we need in Christ. Christ took the deadly consequences of our sin upon himself on the cross so that we no longer need to bear it ourselves, and grants us new life.

Luther used the image of an unequal marriage to illustrate this: A rich man marries a poor, indebted woman and does not only take on her debt but allows her to have a share in his entire wealth.

### **Salvation for sale?**

#### **Luther’s critique of the sale of indulgences**

It is no wonder that Luther’s conflict with the church of his time was ignited by the practice of indulgences which brought economic thinking into the realm of faith. It was of course (at least theoretically) plain to see that it was not salvation itself that was “for sale” with the indulgences.

**SALVATION  
- NOT FOR  
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**“GOD GRANTS  
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They only provided believers, whose sins had already been forgiven through their confession, with the opportunity to purchase “letters of indulgence” as a means of reducing the amount of time they would have to spend being cleansed of sin in purgatory.

It was also emphasized that God would only reward this payment by grace. Nevertheless this doctrine allowed it to appear as if it were the path to salvation itself that was on sale. Moreover, it created the impression that the church could arbitrarily place the gift of salvation through Christ on the market.

Luther protested against this on 31 October 1517 with his Ninety-Five Theses, in which he stated that, with his call to repentance, Christ did not mean a particular church ritual but, rather, an attitude that should permeate every Christian’s life. The church, Luther added, did not have the right to intervene in how believers fared after death. It would, furthermore, contradict God’s goodness, if the church were only to pass on part of God’s gifts of grace to its flock if they were to pay. God grants salvation completely and unconditionally.

Luther also criticized that the sale of indulgences was being used to finance St Peter’s Basilica, and thought the pope should have used his own fortune instead.

The Ninety-Five Theses demonstrate how the theological understanding of freely granted righteousness became, for Luther, a standard to gauge and position church doctrine and practice. Luther further developed and defined this understanding in the course of subsequent disputes. This would lead to what is now described as the Reformation doctrine of “justification by faith alone,” an outline of which will be presented in the following.

**SALVATION  
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“When people look only at themselves it results in this vacillation between pride and desperation. For Luther the way out of this hopeless situation was to turn one’s gaze from oneself to look solely toward God.

## **Justification by faith alone**

Already medieval theology shared the conviction that we cannot actually earn our own salvation. It, too, regarded salvation as a gift of grace. The idea that God expected a least an initial step on our part was, however, popular during Luther’s lifetime.

If we did the little that was in our own meager power, the idea went, God, in God’s pure grace, would reward us with something infinitely greater, namely eternal salvation. This may sound very good at first.

The Reformers recognized, however, that we ultimately turn our gaze inward with a view to our own abilities. The question then remains, Have I done enough? Have I truly done the little that God expects of me? It then becomes unclear as to whether God will really reward us. Or it is just the other way around: We gaze inward and believe ourselves to be leading good religious and moral lives and conclude that we have done enough. Proud of ourselves, we expect that God will reward us with eternal life because we have deserved it.

This inward looking can consequently lead either to desperation or to pride, desperation in the sense of not even living up to God’s modest expectations, or pride in having fulfilled them. This pride, however, can give way to desperation at any time, whenever doubts arise, about whether we have actually deserved our salvation. When people look only at themselves it results in this vacillation between pride and desperation.

For Luther the way out of this hopeless situation was to turn one’s gaze from oneself to look solely toward God. God is not waiting for us to approach God; God does not link our salvation to the condition that we first do something to achieve it.

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"Justification by faith alone" means not trusting in our own abilities but solely in God. Faith means trusting that God has already done all that is necessary for our salvation when Christ took everything upon himself that we ourselves have to answer for. The reason why God views us as righteous does not lie within ourselves. Righteousness "before God" derives entirely "from God."

The Reformers expressed this with the expression *iustitia externa*, i.e., our righteousness comes from outside of us, or *iustitia aliena*, "alien righteousness." This does not come thanks to a quality or achievement that we find within ourselves, but instead by God imputing Christ's righteousness to us.

This means that God, as it were, "views" Christ "into us." When God looks at us, God sees Christ in us, or, more specifically, God sees the sinless Christ in us sinners. With his "creative" vision, God "views" the salvation into us that Christ has won for us.

The Reformers were indeed convinced that God's Word was always creative. When God "speaks" someone righteous, God also "makes" them righteous. If we trust and believe in God's Word, we can be assured that we are also judged to be righteous by God.

This assurance that God's judgment is valid and true without any limitations is, at its core, what the Reformers ultimately understood as "faith." It was not mere chance that Luther, in his Small Catechism, translated the word "amen" as: "This is most certainly true."

The Reformers, however, also maintained that the gift of righteousness can never be established objectively. We cannot "prove" that we are righteous.

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That is and remains an act of faith that cannot simply be translated into demonstrable knowledge.

This applies even more with regard to others: There are no empirical traits that allow us to know, without a doubt, whether someone is in a state of grace—or not. This is indeed the meaning of the famous Lutheran phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, "simultaneously just and sinner."

While this is often understood as if justification does not change anything in our status as sinners, it is not meant that way. It is in fact meant to express that we are only righteous when we look at ourselves, as it were, through God's eyes.

We are truly and fully righteous in God's eyes. If we look directly at ourselves, however, we will recognize that we are sinners and that we do not live our lives in accordance with our Creator's will.

The phrase makes it again clear that our salvation comes entirely thanks to God; justification does not give us possession of anything either that we could bring before God, if need be. Salvation is and remains unearned.

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## STATIONS ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
(1906-1945)

*Bonhoeffer wrote this prose poem a few months before his execution by the Nazi regime in 1945, translated by Frank Clarke.*

### *Discipline*

If you set out to seek freedom, then learn above all things to govern your soul and your senses, for fear that your passions and longings may lead you away from the path you should follow.

Chaste be your mind and your body, and both in subjection, obediently, steadfastly seeking the aim set before them;

only through discipline may a man learn to be free.

### *Action*

Daring to do what is right, not what fancy may tell you, valiantly grasping occasions, not cravenly doubting – freedom comes only through deeds, not through thoughts taking wing.

Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action, trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully follow; freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.



**JUSTICE &  
FREEDOM**

# STATIONS ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

## *Suffering*

A change has come indeed.

Your hands, so strong and active, are bound; in helplessness now you see your action is ended; you sigh in relief, your cause committing to stronger hands; so now you may rest contented.

Only for one blissful moment could you draw near to touch freedom; then, that it might be perfected in glory, you gave it to God.

## *Death*

Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal; death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish the walls of our temporal body, the walls of our souls that are blinded, so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden.

Freedom, how long we have sought thee in discipline, action, and suffering; dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord.



*Dieterich Bonhoeffer was born into a family of seven children in Breslau, Germany. He grew up in Berlin, where his father worked as a prominent professor of psychiatry and neurology; his mother was one of the few women of her generation to obtain a university degree. At the age of 14 he decided he would become a Lutheran pastor and theologian. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews. He was 39 years old when he was taken out of his prison and hanged as a Nazi traitor in 1945. As he left his cell he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life.". Source: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Letters & Papers from Prison, (c) 1953, SCM Press, LTD]*



**JUSTICE &  
FREEDOM**





Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."  
- John 8:12 ESV

## The Church (Body of Christ)

Pray that we will continually seek God's kingdom first and all His righteousness, caring for what's on the Father's heart. In our relationships with each other, that love will be our priority, and we will be our brother's or sister's keeper. In unity of faith and Your righteousness, that we will contend as one man and one Body in Your plans and purposes. Your voice we will hear and not the voice of another. At all times, we will walk in agreement with You, serving You will a clear conscience to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Your kingdom come, Your will be done. Amen

## Nation

Pray for prudence as things gradually open up, and that people are going about the daily lives with vigilance and not taking Covid 19 lightly. We pray economic stability, improving financial situation and work opportunities.

## Justice & Freedom

For the love of truth, justice, mercy, righteousness and humility to be the foundations of our nation and its inhabitants. For the protection of freedom of personal choices and rights of the people; minority or at large - to be respected and honored. For all children to have access to proper education channels and assistance.

## The People

Lord, teach us to be intentional in making ourselves available to others, to help those who have emptiness in their hearts, or pains they cannot openly speak about. Teach us to be caring, compassionate, conscientious and emphatic.

## Prayer Support

SUPPORTING YOU IN PRAYER.

Send in your requests via WhatsApp to Rev. Thomas, Adeline or our Council.

## BLC Community

Pray for the protection and safety of our Pastors and leaders, BLC community and loved ones; that we will grow continually in sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, discernment, resilience, quick to adjust themselves and respond well to changes beyond their control. May we be the salt and light to those around us.



# Announcements

Journey With the Displaced  
Diaspora in Malaysia" with  
Michael Moey  
Time/Date: 23 November  
(Tuesday) @ 8:30PM  
Moderator: Rama Ramanathan  
Upon registering, you will receive a  
confirmation email on meeting details.

**Book Club**  
Sundays  
Nov 7: Ch4&5  
Nov 21: Ch6&7

**Tuesday Bible Study**  
Tuesdays  
8:30pm

**MEM**  
Wednesdays  
November 3 & 17  
8:30pm

**Giving Tree (Fridays)**  
November 12 & 26  
8:15pm  
**Friday Bible Study**  
November 5 & 19  
8:30pm

# Tithes & Offerings

## Account Details

**BANGSAR LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
RHB BANK Acc No.

2142 77 0000 6185

Please specify area of giving in the e-  
transfer, e.g. Tithe, General Offering,  
Mission\* or Agape Fund.

\*The BLC Missions Collections supports  
the following:

- Batu 20, Orang Asli (OA) Congregation
- United Voice – Moh Foong
- Bible Translation Researchers
- Alongsiders (<http://alongsiders.org>)

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By Julie Ricard, Unsplash

**BLC**  
TABLETALKS

**01**

# Journey with the Displaced Diaspora in Malaysia

**Speaker : Michael Moey**  
**Moderator : Rama Ramanathan**  
**Date : 23 November (Tuesday)**  
**Time : 8:30PM**

**(Register by Friday, November 19th)**

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**Zoom Link:**

<https://tinyurl.com/BLCTableTalks01>

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*Michael Moey*, who has been working with Myanmar Refugees in KL for the last 10 years, and is the founder of Ruth Education Centre and Judson Bible College.



*Rama Ramanathan* retired in 2014 as a Senior Quality Executive. He is now focused on researching, writing, and catalysing social reforms. He's passionate about representative democracy, enforced disappearances and deaths in custody. He's the spokesperson for CAGED, Citizens Against Enforced Disappearances.



# THE FATHER'S HOUSE WELCOMES YOU

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**Weekly  
Manna**

31 Oct 2021 Issue