

Created for Good Works

Ephesians 2:8 – 10

Pastor Jonna Bohigian

Hello. My name is Jonna Bohigian, and I am a perfectionist. I am highly competitive and only want to participate in that in which I will succeed.

Growing up, *losing* was my greatest enemy. I didn't want to lose at *anything*; I wanted to *win*.

One day, I sat down to play a rare game of Monopoly with my family. Monopoly takes so long you see, so we only played on the *rare* occasion. Only a few of us were left. All I needed was to round the corner, pass Boardwalk and Park Place, and collect my \$200. With one swift move, I rolled the die and lost *everything*. I lost everything to my dad on Park Place hotels that night. I was *so* angry. I planned to collect my pride and walk out of the room, when my dad turned to me and said, "Well, you can stay and be my gardener at Boardwalk and Park Place!" I *ran* out of the room crying.

That night was a turning point for me. I realized that I *often* lost in games and I didn't want my life to be a complete *wreck* because I lost a silly game. I needed to learn how to try hard *and* be a good loser.

It's difficult, living in life's tensions. Wanting to do well, but not becoming prideful or a sore loser. Wanting to help, but not creating dependence or giving up from exhaustion. Wanting to please God, but not becoming arrogant or despondent.

And it was this last tension that was the undoing of Martin Luther. He *desperately* wanted to please God. He had given up all earthly things – the opportunity for wealth, the possibility of a successful career in law, and the hope of

marriage. He was an Augustinian monk who lived simply and strictly. He strove to subdue his body so that his soul would not fall into sin. And yet, he found himself sinning *constantly*, and so he was *constantly* in confession.

He became *angry* with this God who demanded righteousness. How could God demand righteousness when it was impossible to attain? *No one* could meet this demand!

Luther was *stuck* on Romans 1:17. It says, “In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.” For years, Luther had read this verse and interpreted it to mean that the gospel *threatened* humans with God’s righteousness and wrath.¹ As Luther studied Romans 1, he came to understand that the righteousness of God was not a threat or a demand, but a *gift*. In the gospel, God does not *demand* righteousness, but *gives* righteousness, which is salvation. Luther no longer needed to *become* righteous, to be good before God. God *made* him righteous; God *made* him good. Luther was *free*!

And this is unfortunately where many of us Lutherans stop. We reason that since we cannot *do* anything to earn our salvation, we ought not be concerned with *how* we live our lives. We reason that we will live imperfectly and constantly sin, so it’s best not to worry about it. Let’s do away with the tension. God will save us.

And, as you might guess, this was the conclusion of many when they heard Luther’s theology. Works were no longer important because they did nothing to save a person. And, as you might likewise guess, Luther was *not* pleased with this conclusion. *Of course* works were important!

¹ <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/8742/when-and-how-did-martin-luther-arrive-at-the-justification-by-faith>

Luther wrote a treatise to the people called *The Freedom of the Christian*, which includes our epistle text from Ephesians 2. “For it is by *grace* you have been saved – through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” You and I *cannot* earn our salvation, no matter how hard we try. There is no room for us to boast; salvation comes from God *alone*. But it does not stop there. Verse 10 says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus *to do* good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Your salvation and mine is not so that we might indulge in sin; it is to do good works. Our good works will not save us or make us good people; our good works are the consequence and evidence of our salvation.²

God so loves you that He gave His Son to die to be your righteousness. He did not send His Son to condemn you, but so that you might be saved through him (Jn 3:16 – 17). You are saved not to someday float off and be with Jesus in heaven; you are saved for *now*.

A little Greek grammar lesson. Ephesians 2 verse 8 says, “For it is by grace you *have been saved*...” In English, we don’t think too much when we hear the present perfect *have been saved*. Greek is different. The use of the present perfect means that something happened in the past which has ongoing effects. This verse then means, *you were saved in the past and that salvation means something now and in the future. Salvation is now, on this side of eternity*. As my grandpa used to preach, jumping on the pulpit, “The kingdom of heaven is now! The kingdom of heaven is

² Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 107.

now!" *But it's not all about you. God has more work to do, and He has saved you to be a part of it.*

One of my college roommates printed a sign that hung in the hallway of our dorm. "It's not about me," it read. My roommate was a Sociology Major, and it seemed that perhaps she was playing a sociological experiment on us. Perhaps if we all thought it was not about us, we would make it about each other and serve each other. In the end, I don't think I succeeded in making it about my roommates; I still had plenty more growing to do. And God has continued to offer me grace.

Theologian and pastor, Jim Bangsund, once told this story. "Many years ago, Queen Elizabeth was readying the royal children for a weekend away at the home of friends. She would not be going with them, and wanted to be sure they behaved themselves and didn't bring dishonor to the royal family name. Before they left, she drew them aside and said, 'Children, remember now: royal children, royal manners.' *Royal children, royal manners.* She *didn't* say, 'If you are good, you may be my children.' That would have been *terrifying* to them. How good would they have to be?? Rather, she said, 'You *are* my children. So now let the world see that.' Royal children, royal manners."³

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, you are children of the most high King, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, bound together in the Spirit. So now let the world see that.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

³ James Bangsund, e-mail 10/10/17.

And we pray that our unity will one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side

We will work with each other, we will work side by side

And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.⁴

Amen.

⁴<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jarsofclay/theyllknowwearechristiansbyourlove.html>