

Jurong Christian Church

The Vine



For Internal Circulation Only



ORDINARY TIME

by John Lee



TOTAL DEPENDANCE

by Alicia Wong



ACTS of the APOSTLES

by Joyce Tan



Saved & Home

The Vine This Month
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HOM Editorial

Have you ever wondered if Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin ever really walked on the moon way back in 1969? According to website, www.conspiracies.net/the-moon-landing-conspiracy,



there are a number of reasons why it didn't take place despite the many photos of the event.

Let me list down some of the reasons and you

can go to the website to read more. The flag is flapping, there are no stars and the current technological level is not able to land a man on the moon, how was it possible back then.

Have the conspiracy theorists place enough doubts in your mind that man cannot get to the moon? Yet every year around this time, we celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival with mooncakes and stories of Chang'E flying to the moon. Are some ancient stories beyond doubting or so unbelievable that no one questions their veracity, treating them as fairy tales and yet still trapped to celebrating it?



Do I believe that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin actually walked the surface of the moon? Well if they didn't then it took a lot of money and effort to silence a lot of people, the 2 astronauts, plus everyone in NASA, plus the film crew who made up the whole video, plus their spouses and children, and even every President of the United States since Richard Nixon.

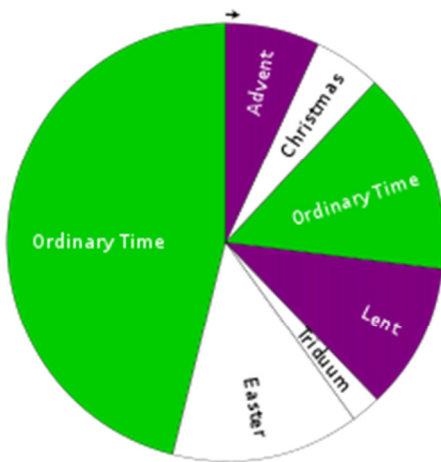
"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

Martin Cheah

ORDINARY TIME

Do you realise that according to the Lutheran Liturgical Calendar, we are now in **ORDINARY TIME**?

9th June 2019 was the Day of Pentecost. 16th June 2019 was the 1st Sunday after Pentecost and 17th November 2019 will be the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost. Thereafter, we will usher in Christ the King Sunday (November 24) followed by the First Sunday in Advent (December 1).



The **ORDINARY TIME** is long season with numbered days. Here is an explanation of what **ORDINARY TIME** means:

*“The period between Pentecost and Advent is called **ORDINARY TIME**. This season makes up almost half of the church year. The word “ordinary” used in this*

*context does not mean unremarkable, but rather comes from the word “ordinal” meaning “counted.” During **ORDINARY TIME**, we move from Sunday to Sunday, with each one standing on its own. The Sundays in **ORDINARY TIME** are the called the Sundays after Pentecost.”¹*

¹ <http://blcfairport.org/ordinary-time-what-and-why/>

When the calendar has periods set aside as **ORDINARY TIME**, then those other periods outside of the **ORDINARY TIME** must have their distinct meanings that are not “ordinary”: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost.

Specifically, each of the seasons outside of **ORDINARY TIME** tells an amazing story. In recalling each story, we either get into a joyous mood with feasting (e.g. at Christmas) or a penitent mood (e.g., during Lent) with deep meditation to help us grow in our spiritual insight of Christ’s suffering for our redemption.

This said, we must understand that **ORDINARY TIME** is not the end of all stories for our spiritual edification. It is not a time when we sit back and relax from any effort to develop our spiritual formation. Rather, there are still stories in the **ORDINARY TIME** from Jesus’ ministry and teachings, stories ranging from the mundane to the miraculous events from which we draw important lessons as we study the Scripture passages of the weekly Church’s lectionary readings. These lectionary readings are relevant to the stages of the **ORDINARY TIME** in correspondence with the continuing happenings in the ministry of Jesus personally or through His apostles.

The world has its many calendars, each type marking out event days that are deemed important to be observed. The calendars are not produced for no reason. For the reasons that our liturgical calendar is produced, surely it is good for Christians to treat the events on the calendar as worthy of attention. Well, we do pay heed to Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and some such events we consider to be “too important to be unnoticed”. However, events in the calendar like the Baptism of our Lord (13th January 2019), His Transfiguration (3rd March 2019), Ascension Sunday (2nd June 2019), etc. are also worthy for our engagement every

time the related Scripture passages are read in the Church. They are significant enough not to be missed out in the Gospel. Paying heed to the whole Gospel storyline as one event leads to another in a connected stream, without gaps in between, certainly helps us grasp the holy message better. If every Christian does so, the producers of the liturgical calendar and the related lectionary readings will be happy that their works are not in vain. 😊

(Admittedly, we are all imperfect in our attention to all events in the calendar. We don't have to be guilt-ridden; however, we can try to be a little better, ongoing with time, and we will see ourselves improving whenever we look back.)

In another sense, when we say "ordinary time" (in common usage), we mean that the moments that we go through are unexceptional. It is time that mankind has known since creation. ("In the beginning ..." – Gen. 1:1 – was when time began.)

Yes, in the **ORDINARY TIME** that is set out in the liturgical calendar, we too go through our life moments in our regular patterns. There is nothing remarkable in this regard.

However, while "ordinary time" passes by unremarkably in our commonplace patterns of daily activities, what is "ordinary time" can become a complex entity when we contemplate its relationship with space according to Einstein's famous theory. As finite created beings, there are some things that we can never fully comprehend. So, let us just settle with the plain notion that there is more than meets our thought about the ordinariness of "ordinary time".

Similarly, we don't have to fully comprehend the sophistication of what **ORDINARY TIME** is, in the liturgical calendar, but just settle with accepting a plain notion that there is potentially more than the "ordinariness" that meets our first thought.

With the divisions of time in the liturgical calendar for our different spiritual postures (joyful; penitent; “ordinal” as in **ORDINARY TIME**), we imbibe the awareness that there is the appropriate time for everything – time for feasting, time to be solemnly meditative, and **ORDINARY TIME** to be free from the emotions for a sober and thoughtful processing of the many ministry experiences of our Lord. So, in this sense, **ORDINARY TIME** is not simply ordinary (as “unremarkable”). In fact, **ORDINARY TIME** is quite remarkable for occupying two big chunks of the whole year in the liturgical calendar (as you can see in the chart above). It is remarkably serious time (a huge portion of the calendar) with emotions set aside to engage the Gospel with dedication to maximise our spiritual formation gain.

So, **ORDINARY TIME** is not so ordinary to be neglected after all.

John Lee

Acknowledgement

With thanks to Rev. Martin Yee and Rev. Soh Guan Kheng for their kind perusal of the article.

TOTAL DEPENDENCE

Faith and Reason are two travellers who happened to meet and set off together. When they came to a deep river, Reason said, "I can never cross this." However, Faith rolled up her sleeves and waded through the river, all the while singing. Seeing Faith being successful in her crossing, Reason followed. When they reached a high mountain, Reason, like a child who can only muster enough strength to walk a mile, despaired of ever climbing over it. Faith simply threw Reason over her back and carried her.



Do you think that Reason is dependent on Faith?

At times I am like Reason, specially at the point of writing this article. I feel some anxiety and then I started going along my line of reasoning. According to logic, certain things will never work. Too hard, too tough, too much effort, it will never work...the list goes on and on. Soon, I began acting on my reasoning. To my dismay, I had acted before I prayed. I have not been totally dependent on God.

Once again, my reason interfered with my faith.

What did the bible say?

Ezra 8:22-23

22 I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is



on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.” 23 So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

Ezra set a great example for anyone facing an unknown future. Before he led a group of returning exiles to begin their long trek back towards Jerusalem, they all **fasted** and **prayed** for a safe journey, trusting the hand of God to guide them. Indeed, it would be a great sorrow if they had prayed after acting on the plan of action instead of before. I am reminded that my prayers should not be an afterthought. I should continue acknowledging Him in all ways, that His Will, not my will be done. Prioritising prayer in my life should be a defining factor in preparing me in my faith journey. I am sure that He will guide me to my next step...and the next...and the next... that faith in Him will lead me to places where reason may not.

Through my reflections, I also noted that God moved the hearts of secular rulers (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) to allow, encourage and even help, the Jewish people to return home. He used these unlikely allies to fulfil His promises of restoration for His chosen people. Reading Ezra reminded me that in my journey, I have encountered unlikely sources of blessings. I am filled with wonder at how God can really work all things together for the good of those who are called by His name (Romans 8:28). Why has God made faith such an indispensable part of our journey? Perhaps it is so we will learn to be totally dependent on Him. Reason tells us to stay put. Faith calls on us to step out of our comfort zone. After all, with God, all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26).

Alicia Wong

Parable

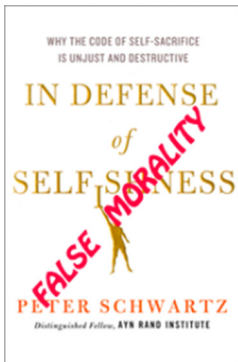
The Father & 2 Sons (Luke 15)

(Re: The younger son)

This parable is more than commenting about individuals. It also has relevance to the symptom of a godless morality (represented by the younger son) in the broader society and the attention on works absent grace (self-righteousness represented by the elder son) among Christians. Here, I share the parable's message through the younger son. I shall share at another time the parable's message through the elder son.

THE YOUNGER SON REFLECTING THE FALSE MORALITY AND THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH

(1) The demand by the younger son for an advance disbursement of his share of the inheritance is indubitably a selfish act. He thinks of himself; let me emphasise, on himself alone and nobody else.



“Nobody owes you a living!” – Does this statement sound familiar? An adverse perspective is that it encourages the idea that if nobody owes me a living, then **I own my happiness to myself and I owe no other.** “What is mine is mine. I want it. I need it. Give it to me – now!”

The unconstructive perspective is not just the misplaced view of some individuals; it is generally palpable in societies. There is even a provocative book titled “IN DEFENSE OF SELFISHNESS” by Peter Schwartz, extolling the virtue of selfishness.

The younger son's attitude conjures up the sense of entitlement that is pervasive as a new morality in societies.

- (2) "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country ..." – v. 13a

It must feel good to the young man to be free from the hard work in the family field (where his elder brother works) and from the annoying control of his father.

"Freedom is cocaine to a teenager. It's intoxicating. It's addictive. And it is often their biggest motivator. They will do anything to get it, and they are terrified of losing it," said Dr.

Julie

Carbery,

an

adolescent

and child

psychother

apist.²

"I have the right to do anything," you say
—but not everything is beneficial.
"I have the right to do anything"
—but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12

The individualist thirst for absolute freedom, freedom without restraint, is unexceptional among the young.

The younger son's attitude reflects the real situation of young people entertaining misconceived ideas of absolute freedom without being aware of the grief it will bring.

- (3) By going far away, the younger son totally discarded any love for his father and elder brother whom he would leave alone – out of sight, out of mind! The father's authority over him, the brotherly affection and the basic pull of conscience were all wiped clean from his soul. In a nutshell, faith in his father and whatever that bound the existing relationship in a body (family) with its inherent

² <https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/ages-and-stages/teens/freedom-the-teen-addiction/>

assurance was totally broken off by the absolute freedom that the younger son sought and got.

“I believe in my own idea of moral right and wrong. No one has the authority to define my conduct.” – The younger son’s father-forsaking act is not just about himself, but reflects some philosophical morality about the absence of a higher authority to define one’s behaviour.

- (4) In the distant country, the younger son “squandered his wealth in wild living.” – *v. 13b*

It is no good thing to have absolute freedom without regulation. Clearly, the bad experience of the younger son showed up the folly of rebelling against the father’s restraint and control.

Note that the young son in desperation hired himself out to feed pigs, but his employer



did not give him proper food and so he had to make do by eating the pods that the pigs were eating. (Lk 15:15-16) How pathetic a situation

he found himself in, perhaps rightly justified

by the sense of absolute freedom his employer had

without moral constraints or a higher authority’s control to even give the workers a basic decent meal! So, the younger son got his just desserts.

The younger son came to his senses not because of direct words of wisdom from his father, but through the “generosity”

of the father in granting his wish to taste the thrill of absolute freedom. The “hidden wisdom” of the father ensured that he would taste the post-thrill bitter pill of truth and thereby come to his senses.

The suffering of the younger son reflects the spiritual truth in a whole range of believers’ experience through rebellion against God and the consequent troubles they face.

- (5) The distant country was a “desirable” happening place to the younger son who found much pleasure to indulge in his profligate lifestyle without a care. His money and the fun were inexhaustible, so he thought. However, unbeknownst to him, the attractions of the “wonderful place of carefree fun” would soon melt away, and so would his cash all burn up.

There are these sayings that “all that glitters is not gold” and “all that is gold does not glitter.” The land of dreams (land of plenty) that the younger son ran to turned out to be a land of delusions (land of hunger). In contrast, the land of industry where his elder brother slaved became a land of promise that provided enough for a celebration feast. What irony!

The repentance of the younger son reflects the truth in the statement by Martin Luther that “man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”³

Morris L. West (1916 –1999), an Australian Roman Catholic writer, speaks evocatively as a character in one of his novels that explores the meaning of Faith:

³ <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>

“I was lost a long time, without knowing it. Without the Faith, one is free, and that is a pleasant feeling at first. There are no questions of conscience, no constraints, except the constraints of custom, convention, and the law, and these are flexible



enough for most purposes. It is only later that the terror comes. One is free—but free in chaos, in an unexplained and unexplainable world. One is free in a desert, from which there is no retreat but inward, towards the hollow core of oneself. There is nothing to build on but the small rock of one’s own pride, and this is nothing, based on nothing ... I think, therefore I am. But what am I? An accident of disorder, going nowhere ...”⁴

The story of the younger son (through his awful adventure and wise repentance) is not simply about the foolishness that lies at the feet of individual sinners.

The broader reach of the message is into the worldly ethos of self-centredness that is pervasive in this era of high-intensity developments that drive people to focus on covetousness so much so that they have little energy to probe the spiritual pitfalls of running away from God for ephemeral indulgences with unfettered freedom.

John Lee

⁴ Morris West, *The Devil’s Advocate*, (Fontana Books, 1977)

Acts of the Apostles

The classes on the ACTS OF APOSTLES are over. I am glad that I attended them. I never knew that there are so many lessons that we can learn from this book. I wished I had known of the better approach of learning many years ago. I would have had a better understanding of God's Word; remembering what God had done for us through His life, death and the stories of many others who had walked and believed in Jesus. Thank you, Rev Dr John Tay.

The Book of ACTS revealed the founding of the Christian Church and the spread of God's Word throughout the Roman Empire. The story of Paul (a.k.a. Saul before He knew and believed in Christ) and his missionary journeys were plagued with the intrigue of political, human and circumstantial strife beyond comprehension.

Somehow, Paul knew the governing systems and the groups of people well (Pharisees, Sadducees, government officials, Jews, certain groups of Gentiles of various positions, etc.) on their culture, beliefs and wayward perspectives that resulted in corruption, bribery, self-interest, deception, lies and undesirable intentions. Paul went as God commanded him to preach and evangelise though he met with intense opposition and was framed for crimes that he did not commit. Nevertheless, God was with him.

He did use his gifts well and leveraged on his learnt knowledge and acquired concepts of authority to navigate through the circumstances, relying on God at all times. He suffered and was frustrated; bullied and was abused, in the various jurisdictions in his missionary journeys. He miraculously survived and managed to fulfil the work that God had set him out to do.

Also, ACTS is a book co-referencing to Luke which provided insights to show the Word of God was shared with the Gentiles because the Jews rejected it and they modified the original meaning of the message to suit their purpose.

These are the reflections and regrets that I have from the sessions and do not represent the general sentiments from you who have also attended the study on the Book of ACTS. So, please hear me out and find your own learning points on this study. The applications and realisations should be taken in the

right context. Please remember to pray and check with your Pastors if in doubt.

Reflections & Reminders

- If Jesus has not come, we would not have been saved.
- It is important to go to God daily.
- Reverse the curse by saying good things about ourselves. Speak positively.
- Let money be our servant not our master.
- Learn to hear God as there are significant messages that we may hear from Him when we grow in the Lord Jesus.
- Just because the teachings were in stories, it does not mean that they are not part of the scriptures. The parables depict a lot of wisdom of God's Word and Work though it is just a form. We should see the teachings behind the situations.
- Be grateful in the little things that God has called you to do. We never know what the final purpose is until the end.
- Principle - Appoint people to leadership and mentor them. Spend time with them to nurture and guide them.
- Salvation is by works or by faith in Jesus Christ? Not works but by faith.
- Paying money does not mean our sins will be forgiven.
- Having a good friend helps us along the way. Have different friends and companions at various stages of our lives to help and protect us via various ways.
- Every day is a gift from God. Live a day at a time

- Value history by reading the Old Testament. Sit in the presence of the Lord and chart your growth in the Lord. History on people tells a story and it is worth reflecting.
- Acts will show us the various instances on the gifts of Spirit. For us, we are Stewards for the Lord and what we have belongs to the Lord at 100%. Be rich in the Lord.
- ACTS is an important book as it shows the journey of the past and why we believe in certain things. It is good to know the scriptures and what it means as it is very important to understand things right.
- We live in a negative world. Build people up and not tear people down. Do people hang around you because they feel positive and encouraged around you?
- If we do not want the Holy Spirit, God will not force it on us. Jesus promised us that if you are willing, no one can pluck you from the Father's hand. We will be saved and have salvation if we want it.
- Sometimes we believe in things or concepts that are not true. We need to know God's word clearly and properly.
- Paul made use of the civic law to protect himself and not suffer unnecessarily. Learn to be wise and street smart too.
- God always wins and if we don't repent, we lose forever.
- Find what God has for you in your life?
- We need to know the power of God and the power of evangelism to be effective to do God's work.
- Despite the circumstances, there are decisions to be made and we should not shrink from our responsibilities.
- If you walk with the Lord, even those around you will also be saved. Trust & obey.

- We all need friends in different seasons of our lives. The support from the Cell Group is important. We need to cultivate friendships and companions like Paul and his comrades in God.
- What is God's purpose? Gospel is to be shared with both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is Lord of all. (Acts 10:36) All who repent and obey Him will be saved. (Acts 5:31-32)

This article presents my inner thoughts on the learning journey on ACTS. I pray that I will better understand as I go through it with the reference materials again. There is still so much more about ACTS that we can relate to and apply in our lives.

One thing for sure is that human nature begets the better of ourselves and we forget who God is. The study is a good reminder that we are not alone in this fight to know ourselves better and ultimately, return to God after we realise that it is HE whom we miss and should have faith in. I will continue the learning in my own pace with God. Please do; reflecting on God's word and not regretting that we have not done so. 😊

Joyce Tan

Remembering Nick Wong

PHUKET - A Singaporean tourist was saved from drowning by lifeguards near Phuket on Saturday morning (Sept 28, 2019), Bangkok Post reported.

Mr Wong Yuen Khuen, 57, was swimming off Koh Hae, or Coral Island, in the southern Thai province when he struggled in the water, lifeguards rushed to his aid, brought him to the beach and performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).



This report in the Straits Times may seem like just another piece of news but to JCC and the Multi-Media Ministry, this Singaporean is not just another statistics but our brother **Nick Wong**.

His love for travelling and landscape photography must have taken him to this scenic island in Southern Thailand.

For many years, Nick had been the de facto photographer for The Vine, taking photos of retreats, outings, events and of course the group photo below.



The earliest recollection I have of working with Nick is when he wrote an article, "My Nias Island Experience" in the July 2003 issue of The Vine. He then helped me with the photography in the Church Retreat in June 2004 at Port Dickson. His articles were few and far between. His next write up was about the JCC Photo Club which he was heading, in the Jan 2013 issue of The Vine. Then he again wrote about another visit to Nias in the May 2014 issue of The Vine.



It is very difficult to find a photo of a photographer because his place is always behind the camera.

Fortunately, here are a few photos where Nick is in the photo.

He is a very complex yet simple person. He runs a printing business at one time and in his latter days, he worked in the security field.

His last words to me, whether I wanted to buy his Canon camera body. I didn't accept his offer because I am a Nikon / Sony user.



Now he has gone home to be with Jesus. May he enjoy the beauty of Heaven's landscapes.



Surely the Lord's goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I

will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - Psalm 23:6

Martin Cheah

The last pics we have of...



"Our God is the God from whom cometh salvation. God is the Lord by whom we escape death."
-Martin Luther.

He walked amongst us and now he walks with the angels.