

# THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE FORMATION



Issue #3 | May – 2023



## Foundation of Biblical Justice



**REMINDER: Annual Conference June 9-10, 2023**

April 16, 2023 - 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail

A gathering was held at First Baptist Church, Vienna, VA to commemorate the LETTER. Speakers included Baptist, Presbyterian, Hebrew, and Muslim faiths. Ms Willie King told the story of transcribing this LETTER from newspaper edges, table napkins, and toilet paper on which MLK Jr wrote. Pictures below: left, faith leaders called to the stage – right, Ms Willie King on far right.



## BOOK REVIEW

[Nurse Leaders and Heroines of the Crimean War](#) by Inez Tuck

Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole are the heroes in the Crimean War. Little is known about how these ordinary women from very different cultural and economic backgrounds became extraordinary leaders. The book describes the significance and intersection of race, class, and gender as necessary contributors to their development and recognition as nursing leaders.

**Website to Read:**

**Letter from Birmingham Jail**

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/letter-from-birmingham-jail>

Below is a sermon delivered on April 16, 2023 by Reverend Dr. Michael Catlett  
at Peace Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Virginia, entitled:

### **PRIVILEGED**

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

John 20:19-31

It is a privilege to be with you this morning and offer the sermon du jour. Sarah could have asked any number of preachers to proclaim, but she asked me, which is why this is my privilege. A privilege is an opportunity or benefit extended to one or some but not to others.

Since I want to talk about privilege this morning it seemed only right to begin with acknowledgement of my own. In recent days I have become humbly and profoundly aware of how privileged I am, and yet with that recognition I am certain I am not fully cognizant of the great extent of my privileges.

First I am a man, which has its advantages and disadvantages, but most certainly has privileges. I am a white man, which adds another layer of benefits. I am an old man, having recently turned seventy, and as the saying goes, age, like rank, has its privileges. Being a minister has certain privileges, too. It's a wonder I am not crushed beneath my bountiful benefits!

I will offer a few examples of privilege, look at the gospel story of Thomas, the disciples and the resurrected Christ through a prism of privilege and consider what that encounter might mean for today.

My pastor, long before age offered me an advantage, feasted on ministerial privilege. Our families would go to a late Sunday evening meal before God and the deacons saw fit to deliver us from Sunday night services. My parents almost always sat with the pastor and his wife, the youth and children sitting at other tables throughout the restaurant. I noticed our pastor's arms were sufficiently long to grip the pulpit when he preached, and were of suitable length to pick up his fork and spoon at the table. However, his arms were never long

enough to pick up the check or reach his wallet. Apparently he didn't want to deny others the pleasure of paying for his meal, so he never attempted to diminish their joy. He believed himself to be privileged. Apparently he was.

I recently was asked to offer grace at the country club where I am a member. If left to my own financial resources I could not be a member of the club. However, when the by-laws were written provisions were made for a few societal servants to gain admittance. The Supreme Court justices are honorary members, for example. Additionally, a few ministers who serve churches within a five-mile radius of the club are honorary members, too. I am one of those privileged ministers, and though a bit uncomfortable about accepting the privilege I play golf every chance I get.

At present I serve on an ordination council at my church, Ravensworth Baptist. The Latina woman who is the candidate is a member of our church staff. The other members of the council include a young woman with a seminary degree working with a not-for-profit, a woman pastor from another state, our pastor's husband who is Black, our pastor who is a woman, and a Latina layperson. After our first meeting it dawned on me I was the old white ministerial man on the council! I was the only person in the group who had never faced adversity because of my sex or nationality or race. My path growing up and my road to college, seminary, graduate school and church employment had been paved. No one ever questioned by ability because of the way I looked, the color of my skin, or my accent. As the psalmist wrote, the boundary lines have always fallen in pleasant places for me. Everyone else on the council had travelled on rutted, gravel roads that sometimes led to dead ends. The boundary lines have seldom fallen in pleasant places for them. I am humbled thinking about how privileged I have been and continue to be.

I wondered if the ten disciples in the room that Easter evening realized how privileged they were when the resurrected Christ appeared to them. They were a *huddled mass yearning to be free* from any and all who sought to harm them because of their association with Jesus. When the resurrected Christ appeared – showing them his hands and side – he quieted their hearts and gifted them with the Holy Spirit. Then the resurrected Christ left with as little fanfare as his arrival.

I have wondered why Thomas wasn't with the others. Perhaps he was a bit braver than they. After all, he was the one who earlier proclaimed he was willing to go and die with Jesus. On another occasion Thomas was the one who said what the others were likely thinking when he told Jesus he had no idea where Jesus was going or how he and the others would get there. Maybe Thomas was out in the streets doing reconnaissance, trying to figure out what the disciples' next steps without Jesus could be. The disciples knew the tomb was empty, and they had heard Mary Magdalene say she had seen the Lord. I doubt they were convinced about the resurrection reports, which is why they huddled together in the room. Then Jesus appeared, showed them irrefutable evidence and they believed.

When they told Thomas he said his belief was conditioned upon him receiving what the ten already had been given. He wanted to see and touch Jesus' wounds. For centuries Thomas has been saddled with a moniker he doesn't deserve. He didn't doubt because he was obstinate and unbelieving; he declared his belief would depend upon the same evidence the ten had received. With apologies to Lin-Manuel Miranda, Thomas wanted to be in the room where it happened. He wasn't, so he wanted it to happen again.

When the resurrected Christ appeared the second time in that room Thomas saw for himself what the others had seen, and he believed what the others believed. The strongest biblical declaration of the identity of the risen Christ comes from Thomas who acknowledged the one who showed him his hands and side is his Lord and his God.

When you are in the room and someone outside asks for what you already have received it sounds like the outsider is asking for a privilege, for a special dispensation, for some unreasonable benefit. I imagine some of the ten might have questioned who Thomas thought he was to place demands upon the resurrected Christ. Why weren't their words and their experiences sufficient to convince him?

When you find yourself outside the room your request to receive what others have received feels like a plea for justice, for equity, for opportunities that bring you closer to parity with those who have already benefitted from chances you haven't had. Thomas didn't ask for something special. He asked to be treated as the others had been treated.

When women ask for equal pay for equal work they aren't seeking an advantage. They are asking to be treated fairly and equitably. In comparable jobs women still earn on average 82% of what men make.

When men of color ask they not be subjected to vehicular stops by police because of their skin pigmentation they aren't seeking special treatment but asking to be treated like white men who are never stopped because of the color of their skin.

When women pastors ask churches to consider them for senior positions their request is not for favored treatment but for the right to be considered like any other candidate rather than discounted because of their sex.

When LGBTQ people ask to be treated with the dignity and respect all others desire to receive they are not asking for special privileges but for the recognition all of us are children of God and imperfectly reflect God's image.

When Latinas and Latinos cry out against discrimination because of their language, culture or traditions they are not declaring they should be treated differently but are pleading for all of us who have been long privileged to extend the same opportunities to them that have benefitted us.

When we recognize our privileges we have a responsibility to work to extend the same opportunities to others that were given us. Sometimes that may mean doing more for others than was done for us because those who have not been privileged have a great deal of catching up to do. Some will say those who have not been privileged need to pull

themselves up by their own bootstraps. When Martin Luther King was told that he responded it helps if one first has boots. However, upon closer examination the expression doesn't mean someone should try harder; it is an acknowledgement the task is impossible. No one can pull one's self up by one's own bootstraps. Stand up and tug all you want on your bootstraps and your feet will always be stuck to the floor. In other words, everybody needs help, especially with what seems impossible. Thomas's declaration was, in a way, a plea for assistance.

One of the problems with privileges is that we aren't often aware of them. My short-armed pastor was cognizant and flaunted his privilege for all to see. I find I sometimes wear my privilege more like the usher badge that attaches to my lapel on the Sundays I serve. I have worn that badge home a few times not realizing I had it on. If you wear a badge at work you might have had the same experience. I suspect we are often unaware of the badges we wear offering us admittance, acceptance and preferential treatment.

But then there came a time when I was part of an ordination council and I thought about the other members and it took my breath away to think how privileged I have been and continue to be. I know everyone will not have the same experiences and chances in life, but we have a responsibility, as far as it is in our power, to make sure everyone has the same opportunities and is always treated with dignity and respect.

I realize the playing field of life is rarely level and the boundary lines don't fall in pleasant places every time. Jesus knew that, too. Blessed are those who haven't seen me, haven't seen the resurrected Christ's wounds and yet believe. Blessed are those who haven't had the same opportunities as others have had, who haven't had the same privileges, who weren't in the room where it happened and yet have the courage, tenacity and faith to believe in the risen Christ, in humanity and in themselves.

Amen.

## COLLABORATING ENTITIES

- Justice Revival ( [justicerevival.org](http://justicerevival.org))
- Reformed Institute of Metropolitan Washington ( [reformedinstitute.org](http://reformedinstitute.org))
- Cornelius Corps ( [corneliuscorps.org](http://corneliuscorps.org))

## JUSTICE FORMATION FELLOWSHIP PARTICIPANTS

- First Baptist of Herndon, Herndon
- McLean Baptist Church, Mclean
- Memorial Baptist Church, Arlington
- Mount Vernon Baptist, Arlington
- Parkwood Baptist Church, Annandale

## GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN BIBLICAL JUSTICE FORMATION

Next Schedule of Course Offerings

Fall 2023	EH 3205 – In Search of Biblical Justice
Fall 2023	MF 4339 – Justice Formation Externship
Spring 2024	MF 4333 – Justice, Church, and Society
Summer 2024	MF 4335 – Critical Engagement with Biblical Justice
Fall 2024	EH 3205 – In Search of Biblical Justice
Fall 2024	MF 4339 – Justice Formation Externship

## ARTICLE LINK

### Letter from Birmingham Jail

If you have already read this previously, it is worth a re-read. If you have never read this we recommend you read it. We think you'll be surprised how relevant it still is today. Thanks for reading.

<https://billofrightsintstitute.org/primary-sources/letter-from-birmingham-jail>

### Florence and Mary: Nurse Leaders and Heroines of the Crimean War by Inez Tuck

[Amazon.com: Florence and Mary: Nurse Leaders and Heroines of the Crimean War eBook : Tuck,Inez: Kindle Store](https://www.amazon.com/Florence-and-Mary-Nurse-Leaders-and-Heroines-of-the-Crimean-War-eBook/dp/B000APR004)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### IJF Advisory Group Meeting

- May 22, 2023  
Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Mon of month  
November - May
- 2:00-3:30 PM
- Location: Virtual

### 2023 Conference: In Search of Biblical Justice

- June 9-10, 2023
- Location: Memorial Baptist Church
- 3455 No. Glebe Rd.
- Arlington, Va.
- Theme: Connecting Human Rights, Civil Rights, and Biblical Justice: The Last Frontier

For the full list of events please visit IJF website:

<https://www.ijf-leland.org/calendar/>

Click on "Education" tab to locate the 2023 Annual Conference agenda.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS



The **John Leland Center for Theological Studies** is a seminary of Baptist tradition that welcomes students/teachers of all church denominations. Leland's purpose is to serve in the Kingdom of God through accessible, accredited theological education. It equips its students to become transformational leaders in the global ministry of Jesus Christ.



The **Washington Theological Consortium** is a community of theological schools/partners from diverse traditions that pursue ecumenical dialogue, interfaith understanding, and educational collaboration to better equip clergy/laity for ministry in a diverse society.



The **Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (MACBF)** serves member churches in the region that includes Delaware, Maryland, Northern Virginia, South Central Pennsylvania, and West Virginia with resources and support.

## The Institute for **Justice Formation**



You can visit the Institute for Justice Formation at our website at [www.ijf-leland.org/](http://www.ijf-leland.org/)

For more information about the Institute for Justice Formation contact:

Rev. Samuel L. Feemster, Director, IJF [sfeemster@leland.edu](mailto:sfeemster@leland.edu)

# JUSTICE FORMATION FELLOWSHIP

Justice Formation Fellowship is a group of churches who unite together for the transformative work of justice in our world, rooted in a commitment to love our neighbor and the recognition of God's image in humanity. We believe the Bible reveals that our God loves and delights in Justice. More profoundly, we believe Scripture makes it clear that God requires his chosen to do justice.

The image of God in humanity manifests as the love and pursuit of the justice God loves. In light of this truth, we believe the church, the body of Christ, is called to proclaim the message and practice the ministry of reconciling humanity to God and all peoples with each other. We see the Institute for Justice Formation as an essential movement in the academic institutions of the church that can, through an informed understanding of God's self-revelation, lead our fellowship of churches to become a justice-seeking congregation.

Unreservedly, we stand with the Institute for Justice Formation, pledging our support, prayers, and commitment to the work of warring against injustice. We stand with each other as we seek to build a fellowship of justice-seeking congregations through worship, education, and advocacy.

We invite you to join us as we dismantle structures, denounce systems, and discontinue silently sanctioning norms and biases that separate us from God and move, intentionally, towards being the church Jesus built and equipped for victory, under the auspices of the Holy Spirit.

For more information about this Fellowship contact one of the following participating pastors:

- Dr. Drew Hill, Senior Pastor, Memorial Baptist Church, Arlington, VA  
[dhill@memorialbaptistchurch.org](mailto:dhill@memorialbaptistchurch.org)
- Rev Sean Roberds, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Herndon, Herndon, VA.  
[Ssrob72@yahoo.com](mailto:Ssrob72@yahoo.com)