

October 25, 2015
John 8:31-36

Reformation B
Let His Freedom Ring

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy Reformation Sunday. Today we commemorate the Reformation. 498 years ago on All Hallows Eve October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Our readings for today focus on the freedom that we have in Christ. There's a problem though. In our text from John 8, Jesus is surrounded by a large group of people. There were Jews before Him and He was speaking to them. I am sure amidst that group there were Pharisees and Scribes and Sadducees and others that were holding onto the Law of Moses a bit too hard.

Jesus says to these Jews, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* In the very next verse it seems as though they have forgotten their history: *"They answered Him, 'We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free?'"* Never is a strong word...they must have forgot that they were once enslaved in Egypt. They were once enslaved in Babylon. They have been slaves in the past. Now they are slaves even to Rome. They are denying the Roman oppression. More seriously though, they are denying the very fact that they are slaves to sin.

The sad part of this whole exchange is that they believed full-heartedly that following the laws of Moses, following their traditions, doing things on their own was enough.

It happens in our world today as well, many times we think we can get out of our own troubles on our own. If you go into a book store, you might see a section of self-help books. Books that might even have "12-step programs." There are "12-step programs" for just about everything. Our society is all about selling the fact that we can get out of our own troubles and sins on our own.

It's the same thing that was going on in the time of Jesus. Perhaps we too might say at times, we aren't slaves to anything. But yes, yes you are, you too have been slaves to sin. Quite frankly, the truth hurts. Sometimes even the truth of the gospel hurts. It's Good News that we are truly free through the Cross of Christ. Without that cross of Christ, we would be bound, condemned, and hopeless. At times, the truth requires us to venture into a dark place. Today, we thank and praise God that the Holy Spirit led a man into this dark valley, the tunnel of chaos, the pit of despair.

We know him as Martin Luther. We remember him as a vibrant church leader, a vibrant faith leader, a dynamic and bold preacher. All of us would be cut to the heart by his preaching. He became one of the most influential people in all of history, but yet his story is not taught correctly in many areas of our lives. He pursued the truth with such

tenacity. With the help of the Holy Spirit, he renewed the proclamation of the Gospel truth.

Martin Luther you could say once lived as the Pharisees did. He did lots of reading, said the right things, did the right things. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, but yet, he went to become a monk. He went to study God's Word and Work. He was even a model monk. He made pilgrimages, he went to confession and did his penance. By human standards and the standards of the church he had every right to feel secure and even free. They were teaching that the works will set you free. With all of this Martin Luther did not feel secure, he was not free, he was bound. He was in a dark place.

As Luther tried harder, the more bound he felt. He couldn't do enough things perfectly. He also knew there was never enough time to confess all his sins. He felt Satan's spiny grip on his soul as he tried harder. He was tortured by his own sins. He found himself confronted with his own human frailty. Something that happens to all of us when we are faced with the truth. He was confronted with that fact that He cannot fulfill God's demands. He could not meet His rules or match His standards.

Luther was desperate and in a very dark place. It was here, in this place that the truth set him free. Luther was led to seek the truth of God's Word. He looked past the man-made rules, the invented human tradition and frankly the flawed teachings of the church at the time. Looking into God's Word, where He found the truth and it set him free, he found what God truly said about sin, righteousness and forgiveness. He for the first time in his life heard the gospel. He had great joy as he discovered this truth again, a simple yet profound trust that Jesus died and paid for our sins, paid a price that we could never pay.

It was here in God's Word where Luther looked from the valley of the shadow of death into the warmth of Gospel light, the Good News of salvation. He discovered what true freedom was all about. He heard and read this for the first time. It was his Aha moment. His wounded soul was in the process of being healed by Christ Jesus.

The Son set Luther free. The Son set Luther free from his guilt and also the life-controlling power of sin.

Luther found in this freedom a mission to tell the world the truth. The truth that convicts, the truth that does set a person free. Luther appreciated the Scriptures and was bound by Christ and His Word...no longer was he bound by sin or the law. He even said at the Diet of Worms: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason...I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God." Martin Luther was free, but yet bound.

Dear redeemed, you also have been set free by the Son. The truth sets you free, but like Luther, we too, oftentimes find ourselves in a dark place, oftentimes we feel Satan's spiny grasp. Oftentimes, we are becoming bound to our sin. Oftentimes we are trying to

get out of our trouble on our own...and the harder we try, the deeper into the pit we find ourselves.

Sin is always crouching at our door. It's always there, and more often than not, Satan grabs us and we fall. We use words that are not kind, whether to someone's face or behind their backs. It's not the sins that happen because we do not follow the commandments. It's also the lies that we believe. It's the traps that Satan pulls us into, the self-righteousness, the societal expectations, and our own self-reliance. You and I have been freed from the shackles of Satan, but unbeknownst to us, we try and reach down and lock them into place again. Oftentimes we trade truth for shallow denial.

Oftentimes we are more concerned with ourselves and what we think is right and we neglect the solid strong substance of the Cross of Jesus Christ. We also at times demand a God that conforms to our ideas, not one that transforms our lives to be disciples. We want a God that sets us free to live as we want. Sure he can set us free from sin, but we at times want to be set free from the Word as well. We see how we have to live and we don't like it. We often demand that God fits into our schedule, and most likely no more than 60 min...but yet we'll devote hours and hours in the stands and in the bleachers and cheer like crazy when the Wild when in OT or the MN Lynx win the WNBA championship or when the Green Bay Packers win Super Bowl 50. We want a God that is convenient and comfortable.

In America we have freedoms, but are we truly free. We are getting uncomfortable as Christians when our freedoms are being threatened. But yet, we are free, but yet are uncomfortable by it. We are free from our sins, but yet bound to His Word. You see for us, denial is just as easy as it was for the people of Jesus day or even at the time of Luther. We place our hope in our heritage and tradition rather than in our faith given to us by Christ and Him Crucified. We'll hold up the things of this world and hide our faith, even from people who we know needs to know Him. And we should be falling deeper into despair.

But yet...something has happened to each of us. We have all heard the Gospel message. We have all seen it. Some of you have heard for nearly a century while others only for a few years. It's a gospel message that doesn't get old. A gospel message that tells us that we are free by Christ, free through Christ, and Free in Christ. We are freed from our sin, because of Christ alone and His work on the Cross and the empty tomb. We are bound to Scripture alone, because that is His Law for us and also the great message of the gospel.

You see through Christ Alone, Scripture Alone, and Faith Alone you are lifted out of the pit of despair, rescued from the fires of hell, released from the shackles of the devil and the chains of darkness because you have been made new in Christ. Your death sentence was overturned in Christ. Your heavy souls are made light in Christ. Your guilt is removed in Christ. Christ has made you free.

July 4, 1776, The Declaration of Independence was signed. America was free from the tyranny of England. The country was founded as a place to freely worship as one wanted. That isn't true freedom though.

Last week I mentioned Mission: Impossible. Christ accomplished the impossible mission for us. This week I want to bring out the 1996 blockbuster hit, "Independence Day." The World was fighting against aliens trying to take over the earth. Will Smith is one of the lead actors, but it was Russell Casse, played by Randy Quaid, a crop-dusting pilot, that gave His life to save the world. He flew his plane into the eye of alien space craft. President Whitmore said these words before the final showdown: "Good morning. In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world. And you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. "Mankind." That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interests. Perhaps it's fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom... Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution... but from annihilation. We are fighting for our right to live. To exist. And should we win the day, the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day the world declared in one voice: "We will not go quietly into the night!" We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on! We're going to survive! Today we celebrate our Independence Day"

We are in a battle of our own, a spiritual battle that has already been won, won on Easter Sunday. It's not us who wins the day. The fourth of July is still an American holiday, but on Easter Sunday, it was angels who declared the victory... "He is risen just as He said." Easter is celebrated across the world. Easter is our Independence Day. Easter was the day that we survive and we are promised to live on.

Each of us has our own separate independence days as well as we are washed clean in Baptism. Luther had his when the Holy Spirit provided him the truth of God's Word, the truth of the Gospel. The truth that set him free. It's the same thing for you. The truth sets you free.

In the movie Independence Day one man gave up his life, an unlikely hero. In your lives, an unlikely hero, gave up His life for you...but He didn't just give it up...He took it up for you...and you have all the freedom from sin in the world. You are free from sin, you are free to do the things God calls you to do, but you are still bound to His Word, and to live your lives as Disciples of Christ.

Praise be to God that through Martin Luther, the truth was rediscovered, and spread across the globe, to the point where we have it today, the truth of the gospel...the truth that the Son sets you free.

So Let HIS freedom ring!

IN Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God that passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.