

Reformation 10/28/18  
John 8:31-36

YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.

Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Kind of a mixed message here. We Lutherans would say both Law and Gospel. The fact that you need to be set free, tells you that you are not free at all. In fact, the need that you have to be set free tells you that you are still enslaved and you cannot set yourself free because you have to be “set” free.

The Jews who had believed in Jesus didn’t like hearing this one little bit and they told Jesus they didn’t like it, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free (v. 33)’?” Their memories very short and quite bad because they had been slaves. They were slaves in Egypt and to the Babylonians. They seem to have forgotten all of that.

But, their biggest problem was not faulty memories, but the fact that they were still enslaved. They were held captive by something they could not free themselves from. And Jesus tells them exactly what it is when He says this, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin (v. 34).” They had not kept the Commandments of God. They had not feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things. They had not loved their neighbors as themselves.

What is so fascinating about what Jesus says is that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. Yes, those words were directed to the Jews who had believed in Him, but they are also directed to you and to everyone. You don’t deny it at all. In fact, you confessed it this morning,

“We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment.”

That’s your condition. You are enslaved to sin and powerless to free yourself.

You deserve death and the punishment of hell. But Jesus says this: You will be set free. Someone needs to set you free and that someone is Jesus.

The Jews who had believed in Jesus boasted and bragged that “we are Abraham’s offspring”. They didn’t want to hear anything about this slavery business. They did not see themselves enslaved in sin. They just didn’t get it.

And you know what? The people of Luther’s day didn’t get it, either. They didn’t understand what the truth was. They thought they could be free from their sins if they just bought indulgences. They believed that because the Church was the seller of those indulgences and the Church of Rome said these indulgences had the power of the cross to forgive sin and set you free from the wages of those sins. And, the people of Luther’s day bought’em.

We celebrate the Reformation on October 31<sup>st</sup>, because that was the day Luther posted his 95 Theses, the 95 “Protests” against the teachings of Rome. In Thesis # 32, he said this: “Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.” Luther said that because indulgences don’t set you free from sin and its wages of death. The fact is they make you more enslaved to sin than you already are.

You know what? People of today don't know the truth either. They think to be free of their sins they have to make some type of decision. You've heard this silliness of the human reason. It goes something like this: I made peace with the big man upstairs. Really, you made peace? You could make peace with God? Then why did Jesus humble Himself of a Virgin and go to the cross to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world?

Or, of course, we poor sinners today do what those Jews who had believed in Jesus did: We deny that we are enslaved to sin. We kill the unborn child in the mother's womb because the folly of human reason says it's just a mass of tissue, not really a human life. And if two people of the same sex want to marry or if two heterosexuals want to engage in sex outside of marriage, it's ok the folly of human reason says because we love each other. The news this past week was full of the lottery being 1.6 Billion dollars, and the masses flocked to buy their tickets. I wonder how many who confess Christ bought a lottery ticket. After all the Bible says, "by their fruits you will know them (Mt 7:16)." Their fruits were certainly saying they feared, loved, and trusted in the lottery more than God to open His hand to satisfy their need for daily bread. The truth is we don't see our sin.

My Dear Friends in Christ, Scripture is very clear: no one is saved by works of the Law; no one is saved by what they do, or do not do. The folly of human reason and the common thread of every religion other than Christianity is that we can save ourselves. The Jews who had believed in Jesus thought that as Abraham's offspring, they were not enslaved to sin. The people of Luther's bought indulgences to free them from their sins. Our sinful flesh is always believing -- If I just do the right thing, if I just make the right decision, then I will be set free from sin, death, and the devil.

But, the TRUTH is...the Son must set you free and if the Son set you free, you will be freed indeed. The Bible says this, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall never perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).” Truth is Son of God was born of virgin mother to take on the sins of the world as His very own because He had no sin of His own. To set you free, Jesus, the Son of God, carried all those sins to the tree of the cross, to suffer the Righteous One for us unrighteous ones, that He might make peace with God. The truth is by His suffering and death, He has broken the bonds of sin on you. Truth is...Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light, and no one comes to the Father but through Him.

And, the Good News for you in the valley of the shadow of death is that our Lord Christ takes all that freedom from sin, death, and the devil He won for you and makes it your very own in the Means of Grace.

Indulgences? Don’t need’em! You have something much more precious than cash money that bought your freedom. Jesus bought your Freedom “not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death (2<sup>nd</sup> Article).” And He gave you that freedom in the washing and Word of your Baptism. You have a piece of paper – your baptismal certificate – that says you are free and, because Jesus has set you free, your sins are forgiven, you are rescued from death and the devil, and you have eternal life.

Jesus speaks His Words into your ear, and you have life, because the Words are spirit and life (cf Jn 6:53).

And, He feeds you with His life-giving Body and Blood so that you can be strengthened and empowered to go out and live the life of freedom you have in Christ to the glory of God and service to your neighbor.

This, Dear Friends in Christ, is the truth of the Gospel, the truth that sets you free.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.