

REFORMATION SUNDAY
October 25, 2020

Text: John 8:31-36
Theme: We Are Free

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

A little bit of history: On October 25, 1774, the First Continental Congress sent a petition to King George III of Great Britain. In the petition they informed his majesty that the acts of oppression forced upon the colonies by the British Parliament meant that the American people could no longer stand behind British rule. In the subsequent document (the Declaration of Independence) our Founding Fathers declared that all people were created equal and its citizens had rights.

We have the right to live our lives the way we want to as long as we do not harm others. We have the right to pursue our own happiness without the fear that some outside force will come and take away what we have earned by our own hard work. We have been set free to have control over our own lives. We are not subservient to any lords or masters or kings. When our nation established these guiding principles, it laid the foundation for all the other freedoms we have such as freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

Freedom is an essential and necessary part of who we are as citizens in the United States of America. We love to sing the words in our national anthem that proclaim that we are the land of the free. We love our independence and when those outside of the free world ask: *Who does your life belong to?* We answer with pride: *We belong to no one! Our lives are our own. And no one has the authority to take that away from us.*

We offer our prayers of thanksgiving to God that we live in the land of the free. It is a blessing to be afforded such freedoms. And it is in the story of the Reformation that we are reminded that God has also given us freedom.

In our lesson for today Jesus said to the Jews and to all who believe in him: *If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

It seems we need to follow a certain sequence before we experience true freedom with God. We need to stay focused on his Word. We need to commit ourselves to Christ who will reveal the truth to us and it is the truth that will set us free.

But what truth do we need to know?

I believe there are three truths that we need to be fully aware of. The first truth is about ourselves. When we stand under the rule of God we do not hold up so well. We can say that we have Christ in our lives and as a result we behave so much better because of it! We can say we do our very best to make good and faithful decisions that not only benefit ourselves but others. All good! We are headed in the right direction.

But we must never think that we are totally free from our ability to sin. That is the truth we need to know about ourselves. The truth is that no matter how hard we try we cannot always control our thoughts or the desires of our hearts or our wayward tongues. We might very well be doing a marvelous job on the outside but we need to look inside ourselves as well. Can we honestly say that we are not a slave to sin? Can we honestly say that we are not chained to sin? Sin is what oppresses us and holds us hostage.

Once we recognize the truth about ourselves then we can know the second truth which is that we need Jesus Christ. If we do not see our sin or if we believe we have somehow graduated from committing sin then we have no use for Jesus. But we will always stand guilty before God. On our own nothing can make up for the wrongs we have done. On our own nothing can right the sins we have committed. There are not enough good works in the world that can make us right with God. Only Jesus Christ can do that . . . only Jesus can set us free.

I love when I have the opportunity to teach Bible lessons to the Pre-School children. Already they are well-trained to know that if they do not know the answer to any of my questions then it is safe to blurt out the word – *Jesus!* All our questions today are answered with Jesus. Jesus is the one who speaks with authority.

The third and final truth is that our freedom comes at a cost. In his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed Martin Luther states that even though God created all things for good it was the devil who came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all kinds of misfortune. As a result we were under the wrath of God and sentenced to eternal damnation (all of which we deserved). There was no lasting help or comfort for us until God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into our world.

What was the cost? Jesus! Jesus came in human form, conceived and born without sin (by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the Virgin Mary). He came so that he could overcome sin (our sin). He suffered, died, and was buried so that he could pay the price (what we owed). He did not pay with silver and gold but with his own precious blood. Through his death and resurrection sin and death no longer has power over us and we are free and all things are now subject to him.

Who reveals the truth about us? Jesus

Who sets us free? Jesus

Who paid the price for our freedom? Jesus

I offer the following words with great pastoral care! Because we are human, sin still has a grip on us. We are the ones who get bogged down in our own guilt because somehow we know we let God down. We need to believe with your whole heart (by grace through faith) that Jesus set us free from the burden of our sin. Our burdens are no longer meant to be carried alone unless we choose to keep them to ourselves. Jesus wants us to carry them. It is what makes us free.

It is a remarkable teaching and a remarkable truth that God in Christ loves us so much that he took on human flesh, led a perfect life, shed his blood, and then made us his very own. Why would God do such a thing? Simply because he chose to love us.

We have done nothing (we can do nothing) that could cause God in Christ to look at us this way. It was his choice and he paid whatever was necessary so that we could belong to him. He loves us and our sins are forgiven and that is the freedom that Jesus Christ talks about in our lesson today. The truth about us is that we are sinners and we need Jesus Christ. And the truth about Jesus Christ is that he is our Savior. God is fully paid. We are free.

We are free from our past, free from regret, free from fear, free from old hurts and mistakes. None of these things define us. We are free and the future is wide open. Amen