

Sermon for Reformation Sunday 2025
Stewardship of Freedom

We are now at the third and final Sunday of our Commitment to Giving campaign.

In the first week we learned the importance of cultivating gratitude and the power that expressing our gratitude brings to our life together and our journey of faith or discipleship.

The stewardship of gratitude helps us talk the talk and walk the walk.

Last week we learned about the stewardship of persistence which figures greatly in living generously as God's people.

Most of all, we learned that we can be persistent in our pursuit of doing what is right and in living generously because our Lord is persistent in pursuing us, in sustaining us and empowering us.

We can give our all because Christ has given his all to us.

This Sunday we celebrate the 508th anniversary of the Reformation and Holy Trinity's 105th anniversary as a congregation serving here in Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

What a blessing to give thanks and praise to God for helping us to be persistent in serving God by loving our neighbor . . .

for 105 years and counting.

The history of our life together, like all journeys of faith, has had ups and downs and even plateaus but through it all we have been the Body of Christ serving in small and sometimes larger ways all to the glory of God.

For 105 years, whether we liked the changes or not, God has been making all things new in our life together.

And God is not yet done!

A couple of years ago I was showing a confirmation class a few scenes from the 2003 movie, "Luther."

One of the students piped up and said,

"So you mean Luther was upset about how money was being raised for the church?"

That young man did have a point and valid observation—even if it didn't begin to cover the complexities of the document Luther posted on the Whittenburg church door 508 years ago. As it happens Luther did have quite a lot to say about stewardship. Two of his 95 Thesis speak against the waste of financial resources in purchasing indulgences from the church. Luther taught that our financial resources were gifts from God and meant to be used wisely to care for our families and to share as we are able to the work of the church in order to care for neighbors in need. Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism* that the temporal (as in temporary) goods we have, God has given us for this life. Above all, Luther said, it is no sin to have money, and property, wife, children, house and home. But we must not let it be our master. We must make it serve us and God through our neighbor. We are to be the stewards of all that God has given us.

Which means, we are to be stewards of our freedom. We have all heard Paul's exclamation from his letter to the Galatians: *For freedom Christ has set us free. For you were called to freedom brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence but through love become servants to one another.*

All of us are more than aware of how the misuse of our freedom causes harm to ourselves and to others. Perhaps some of us have even said, why does God allow people to do so many terrible things? And yet . . . what kind of God would have us be mere puppets or dolls to move around on the stage of life? It's important to ask ourselves, what kind of God is our God? Is God a power-rangers God, swooping in and smiting down with punishment at every wrongdoing? Or is God a God of love, whose power is grace and forgiveness? The kind of love that lifts us up and gives us strength to be free to be *in* the world but not *of* the world.

When we are *of* the world, we are self-indulgent.
When we are *in* the world, we are free to serve as Christ serves us.

For the Christian, freedom isn't just a state of mind; it's a state of being.
When Jesus says, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,"
he means it.

The freedom that Christ brings into our lives is a game-changer—
it upends our assumptions, to reshape our habits,
and sends us out into the world as people free from being *of* the world.
The struggles that we see and experience in life might remain before us,
but since the Son has set us free,
we are not bound to respond to those things
in the same way as we once did.

The truth of the gospel changes minds and hearts,
making new and previously unknown possibilities for action
that share the love and freedom we know.

Freedom in Christ, therefore, is not an end in itself.

We're not free just to "be free" all on our own.

No . . . as the anthem the choir will soon sing the words of Christ—

If you continue in my word, you will truly be my disciples.

And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

We are drawn into a closer walk with the God who has set us free.

As we experience this freedom in our lives,
the Holy Spirit guides our hands
into service as stewards of all of God's gifts.

As you know, today is the day we consider our Commitment to Giving.

What does it mean, then for us to be stewards of truth and freedom?

Living in the truth of the gospel as a forgiven people whom God is
always pursuing to make all things new, with gratitude we
trust God will guide our steps.

Our freed hands become instruments of God's grace in the places,
we live, work, worship and play.

Like so many other small size churches, Holy Trinity continues to face challenges to use our resources wisely and well.
Could this be the year you step out in freedom to give more generously?
Dare I suggest that we all consider to commitment to give some increment of \$5 out of gratitude and in celebration of our 105th Anniversary of mission and ministry?
You and I are under no obligation.
There is no law or *have-to* about how we get to share your time, your talent and your treasure.
Because today we celebrate the treasure of truth and freedom God has given to us, to the world.
This is the treasure of unsurpassed value that knows no bounds, yet we can hold a portion of it in our hands.
And we all have a gift to give in the name of Lord.

Every day as you go out into the world—at home, at work—facing the struggles and hardships of this world, we have the word of God and the promises of Christ that somehow, someway, he is making all things new, beginning with you and me—here in this place, beginning from today.
You and I are free to make a commitment to generosity, to giving freely with joy and thanksgiving for all that God has given to us.
The Son has made us free and we are free indeed.
Amen. This is most certainly true!