

Text: John 8: 31-36
Theme: "Freedom in Christ"
#977

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Reformation/Confirmation
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No matter what we're doing these days, we are being pelted with election advertisements and pleas from people running for offices. Radio, newspapers, television, even our roadways—all are filled with election ads urging us to vote for a certain candidate or group of candidates.

The upcoming election and the recent horrific mailings of those pipe bombs, along with the hate-crime at the Jewish Synagogue in Pittsburgh, are reminders of the cost of our country's freedom. Through these and other events, we are reminded of the privileges, responsibilities, and sacrifices that are, and have been, a part of the freedom we enjoy as a nation. A while back I read a book of biographies on the founding fathers of our country titled, *Revolutionary Characters*, which helped me better appreciate the lives of the people who played a major role in shaping the future of the country we live in and call home. We cannot forget the continuing war on terror our country is fighting and the sacrifices of the brave men and women who are giving their all for our precious freedom as a nation. All these things remind us that we, as a nation, live in freedom and that freedom is not something which we can take for granted.

Freedom is something the Jews of Jesus' day felt that they had in

their religion. The country of Israel had been occupied by many different countries throughout its existence, and they were currently occupied by the Romans. But they felt a freedom within their religion that they felt surpassed the different occupiers of the country in which they lived. They felt that even though they were under Roman control, ultimately God was in control and their freedom was found in God. They felt that by keeping the Law of God they were free. It seems ironic that by keeping the Law they were free because we believe that we are in bondage to the Law. So when Jesus said to them that through faith in Him they will know the truth and will be made free, they took great offense.

Jesus told them, "...everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." This message of bondage to sin was expounded upon by Paul in our lesson from Romans today. Paul claimed that we are in bondage to sin and to the law which condemns us in our sin. We are, then, sentenced to death by a righteous God who requires adherence to the law for salvation. Paul then went on to proclaim that it is only through the grace of God, given us as a gift in Jesus Christ that we are truly made free. Jesus' death paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from death.

Prior to our Gospel lesson for today Jesus was talking to the scribes and Pharisees about who He was and where He had come from. He talked

about His being “from above with the Father.” He told them that after they had “lifted Him up” (on the cross) they would understand where He had come from and who He was. But the scribes and Pharisees neither understood nor believed Jesus. They didn’t want to believe Him; their hearts were hardened against Him. Many people, who heard Jesus, because He was talking publicly in the temple, **did** believe Him. So our lesson picks up with Jesus talking to those who believed what He was telling them. Jesus said He was telling them the truth He had heard from God. He reminded those who were listening about Abraham: he believed God and followed God. Those who did not believe were acting as if Abraham was not their father because they did not believe Jesus.

So what was the truth and the freedom that Jesus was talking about? Listening to the ads for the election it is nearly impossible to learn the truth—it is so relative to each candidate. There is possibly some truth in what they say, but there’s also a lot of misinformation and exaggeration! We really can’t believe much, if anything, of those ads. That’s when I appreciate the mute button on the remote! The truth **Jesus** was talking about was not about knowledge in general, but of the saving truth He has come to bring the world. In John 14 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The truth

Jesus is giving us is of the way of salvation, and the way of true freedom. Believing in Jesus we find freedom from the power of sin and death and our slavery to that sin. So Jesus says to all who believe in Him: Continue in His word, believe in Him as your Lord and Savior, and you will know the truth of salvation in Him. You will be made free from sin's grip of death.

Many years ago, Luther discovered that our freedom in Christ is given to us as a free gift from a loving Savior. Luther learned the truth as he studied Romans 3:19-28. This passage led him through the Reformation, gave him the strength and will to do what God was calling him to do. It led Luther to the truth of Jesus—that we are justified (made right with God) by His grace as a gift. It is not by our keeping the Law (which we cannot do) that we are saved, but it is only through faith in Jesus.

We're still in bondage to sin, unable to free ourselves as we confess nearly every Sunday, but through Jesus' death we are freed from the deadly grip of sin. We're forgiven, loved, adopted, and given the keys to the Kingdom of God.

The freedom we are given through our faith in Christ gives us the ability to be the best persons we can be without having to worry about earning our way to heaven. When we realize what Jesus has done for us through His death and resurrection, we are free to respond in love toward

our friends and neighbors. We respond to the grace of the Gospel and reach out in love because of Christ. We cannot earn our salvation, but we receive it in faith and are free to share that gift with others.

So Jesus says to you: **Laiken, Mateo, Hermione, Makya, and Crisavy,** “Continue.” Continue in the Word you have been taught and in which you believe. As you publicly affirm your baptisms and profess your faith in the Triune God, continue to grow in your faith, believing that Jesus Christ is your Savior and live as people who know the truth of Jesus, and you will be free.

--You'll be free to worship Jesus and you will live in His grace;

--You'll be free to love and serve others as Jesus loves and serves us; --You'll be free to be the person Jesus has called you to be and the person God created you to be;

--You'll know the life of a servant of Christ and the joy of serving Him in this world in everything you do in life;

--You'll be free in the midst of whatever you encounter in your lives—whether it will be joyful, painful, dangerous, or sad;

--You'll never be alone—because the One who was lifted up on the cross for you (and all who believe) will be with you to reach out to you from the cross, giving you strength, patience, endurance, and joy in Him. And

His peace, which surpasses all human understanding will be with you in all of life. Use your faith in Christ to help stem the awful speech, the divisiveness, and the hatred we are experiencing. Use your faith to do good.

Continue, believers; continue in Him. Be transformed through Him in faith so you will be able to discern His will for you and to be able to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect in Christ. It is only through Jesus Christ that you will be made free and be able to know the truth.

AMEN

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