

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Reformation Day (Observed)
John 8:31-32
October 28th, 2018

When Martin Luther was a young monk, he was obsessive about confession. In fact, his Father Confessor, Johannes von Staupitz – the man to whom he would make his confession – began to get fed up with Luther’s painstakingly long and detailed list of sins. Luther feared God, and worked as hard as a good monk could to not miss one sin that could possibly send him right to hell, if he didn’t bring it before the ears of his father confessor.

One time, Luther confessed his sins for six straight hours. You can imagine trying to sweep in every nook and cranny of the heart – every conceivable sin – was mentioned at least once... and probably three or four or even more times over and over again. This is enough to leave any person hearing such a long and arduous confession blurry-eyed and exhausted. Staupitz, on more than one occasion tried to shock Luther out of his downward spiral. He said, “God is not angry with you, Brother Martin!” He once said, “You are angry with God! Don’t you know that God commands you to hope?” Another time he said, “Look here, if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive – parricide, blasphemy, and adultery – instead of all these peccadilloes.”

Luther had his struggles. Yes, this champion of the faith... this man of courage... struggled so much more than most. He struggled with what to do with his own doubts because he knew he could never be good enough and worthy of God’s mercy, grace and salvation. And, what is more, he knew that life as monk was designed to free one from temptation, to keep one so busy with praying and singing and doing what there was no room for sorts of things he might have been able to do if he had continued as a lawyer. But for Luther, the more he tried to be holy, the more he saw that he couldn’t be. The more he cleaned, the more furniture he moved, the more dirt he saw. He was leagues past fretting over temptations that guide the heart toward murder or adultery – miles beyond that. That was small potatoes to what Luther called “real knots.” And, he had no idea how to untangle them.

But Luther did not find freedom. He found bondage at the hands of an angry God that demanded more of him than he could possibly give. This is not just Luther’s problem. This is our problem. We are inclined to think that discipleship... following in the Lord... begins with perfect obedience. And if we can’t exhibit perfect obedience, then we can’t be disciples. So why even try... or we will just despair each of our days because we are not being the perfect disciple. We, like Luther, seek freedom in the wrong way.

So, let’s see what Jesus says in the Gospel of John, the appointed text for today. *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* According to Jesus, freedom, which sounds so “freeing” is found in the Word... which makes you a disciple... which gives us knowledge of the truth and the gift of freedom. Notice how freedom is not given. It’s not given in human works through six hour confessions... it’s not given in fear of whether or not we’ve cleaned house in every nook and cranny of our lives. It’s not given in punishing ourselves with worry about how big our faith is or how that faith never wavers in the face of danger or discord. Freedom does not come by the law beset on our hearts, but rather the Gospel that places hope in the perfect work of Jesus for sinners like you and me... who have an imperfect faith... who possess such a huge amount of sins for God to deal with. Freedom comes through the Word... the Word of the Gospel that cleanses poor miserable sinners of their unrighteousness, no matter how dirty their house happens to be. It doesn’t matter who we are. There is always dirt behind the furniture.

Dear beloved in the Lord, your sins are too big for you. You take a survey of your life and you name your sins before God... and I promise you will forget most of them. You can’t even remember

all of them. How can you be worthy to enter into the kingdom of God? You are not worthy. Yet, the law presses hard upon our hearts and it should. It causes you to see who you are... a sinner that cannot be saved... by naming sins... by beating yourself up over them... by working off your tremendous debt. Repent, dear brothers and sisters. Turn to the Lord. Confess your sins. Be honest with God. Say, I'm a poor miserable sinner and without you there is no life in me. But thanks be to God. He has promised to place His life in you... and He even says how... *"If you abide in my word... the truth, (that truth) will set you free."*

The Word of truth that sets us free is the Word made flesh... Jesus Himself... who took every sin... the sins that you can see with your eyes and the ones hiding in every nook and cranny of your lives and wipes them clean. He uses His blood as the cleaning agent. He uses death to give you life. I know you think you must do something for salvation's sake... but there is nothing you can do. Your works are imperfect. But not God's work. Not the work of our Savior Jesus. He all things right and good and perfect. And when Luther discovered the Gospel (it wasn't lost... he just hadn't seen it for what it actually was) in Romans 1:17, *"The righteous shall live by faith alone,"* he realized that God's grace through faith is where salvation is found. And that is in Jesus... and in no one else or in no other thing.

So as disciples who are freed to live a Christian life apart from the demands of the law and instead rest in the merit of Jesus... we better understand what freedom brings. Let me give you four things that this freedom in the Gospel brings for your daily walk as a Christian.

First it brings you freedom from fear. The man who is the disciple never again has to walk alone. God is our strength and ever present help in trouble. And, you have a Christian community built for the sake of prayer and support for you when there are times you do become afraid.

Second it brings freedom from self. Many a man fully recognizes that his greatest handicap and his greatest enemy is his own self. We have often thought... if I could just get out of my own way, I would be better off. But God "recreates" you anew. You are His image bearer when you bear the presence of God in your life each and every one of your days.

Third, His truth brings freedom from other people. Sometimes we are fearful over what others will think and say. Noted author H.G. Wells once said, the voice of our neighbors sounds louder in our ears than the voice of God. The disciple is the one who ceases to care what people say, because he thinks only of what God says.

Finally, it brings the freedom from sin. We try to break away from it... our sins, our habits, our self-indulgence, our weaknesses, and irritabilities have mastered us. Try as we might we still fall. Being a disciple means life in Christ. And that life is a life in forgiveness. It doesn't mean you are perfect. And knowing that Christians are imperfect is worth noting. Knowing how we become righteous... how we are made to be disciples in Christ is essential.

Beloved, don't join the monastery... or the convent... but rather keep on living in the world. Luther mentions that we are truly being Christians when we live out our faith for others. But live as people who are not of this world. And that is already given to you. You can't earn it... or name every sin to achieve it. It's given to you by a Lord who is merciful beyond understanding. That is the reformation mantra. You are saved by grace through faith. And Freedom comes only through the Gospel of Jesus. Nowhere else. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.