

Pastor T.C. Arnold
John 8:31-36
Reformation Day (Observed)
October 25th, 2015

I would imagine that a young Augustinian monk, not yet 33 years old, who walked out from his monastery cloister with a large page, some nails, and a hammer -- headed toward the castle church in Wittenberg Germany on October 31st, 1517 had no idea that what he would be doing that very day, the world, almost 500 years later, would still be talking about. I would imagine that Luther had no idea that, while he wanted those 95 theses debated and discussed, that someone would actually take it down off the church door the day before the crowds would gather to celebrate All Saints Day, and translate it from Latin – the language the theses were written in – to German and then use Guttenberg’s marvelous invention of the printing press to make sure more than just leaders in the church were reading them. I would imagine that Martin Luther had no idea that he was about to change the world.

But he felt that something must be done. It had gone on too long. John Tetzel was spouting off his false mantra that infuriated some including Luther. Tetzel was selling indulgences, that is, pieces of paper that would guarantee the *freedom of the soul* from a place called purgatory so that it might immediately go to heaven. Tetzel would say, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.” You see, Pope Leo X needed find a way to subsidize is massive project to build St. Peter’s Cathedral. This is how he could do it – sell souls out of purgatory and into heaven. If no one was going to stand up and say this is wrong, then who ever would?

You see, the church was selling freedom to people. For themselves or the ones they love they could buy freedom from an imaginary holding place called purgatory – a place where Christians who are not quite good enough to get into heaven – and still needs to undergo further purification because of the evil they did on earth – would now be set free to go immediately into heavenly glory. How great of a deal is that! *You can buy freedom.* You can buy your way into heaven. Or so it was being taught.

But one needs not to buy freedom into heaven. The price for freedom is not “a coin in the coffer.” The price of freedom is blood. And that blood was shed on a cross at Calvary on Good Friday. Jesus is the price of freedom – our freedom. For this reason he says to the Jews who believed in him, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*”

Set free!!! Jesus has set us free! This is wonderful and a huge weight off our shoulders. Luther said in his Treatise on Christian Liberty that, “A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” This is true. Our faith in the work of Christ – in our baptisms – is being renewed each day. Luther put it this way: “One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God and the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, in John 11, ‘*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...*’” If we have this word, we lack nothing. To preach Christ with the faith in Christ’s words is to set free the soul and to save it.

Then, at the same time, Luther said this about our Christian life: “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” We are both a free and yet dutiful servant. These things are opposites. How can we be both in one? Well, just as the Christian life is a paradox – two seeming contradictory things that come together to form one great truth, so is our life as free and slave men and women. We are freed by the gospel, nothing we do will earn God’s favor. Yet, we have been freed to be a servant. This, too, is what God has called the Christian to be – a servant of all, subject to all. This is a blessing as well. This is a blessing to your neighbor and a blessing from your neighbor to you. It’s this part of the Christian life that is so hard for us to stay within. We flop out of our duty to serve our neighbor into the comfort of self-service all the time. Our duty as slave puts “self” aside for the sake of those we love – those who are loved by God – those who are in our community who we don’t know very well – those who you might only come into contact with on a limited bases. Those you will know not how your kindness and concern for them may make a lasting impression that will stay with them their whole life. This is our duty and it has a purpose. It has a purpose for the neighbor and not your eternal life. This purpose is for the Christian who lives in this life right now – not for the Christian’s life to come. That is why you are both – free and slave – slave and free. What Christ has made you to be before the heavenly throne and what Christ has made you to be before your neighbor.

When Luther left the study of law and became a monk, no one, nor he, could have imagined that we would still be talking about something he wrote today. Let’s be reminded. Luther was just a man – no more no less. His writings are not Scripture and we dare not treat them as such. But they do point us to the truth in the Scriptures. So, we search the Scriptures to find truth. That’s what our celebration today is all about – the search for the truth where truth is to be found. Not the truth from man – but the truth from God. If man speaks the truth, we listen and we heed these words. But that truth of man can only be based on the truth from God. It cannot come first from man and believed to be the truth of God.

I don’t mean to be all convoluted. But I want to be clear: seek the truth in His Word. Luther shows us how. And for our life today, with all its stress, all its pressures to excel, with all its, “you’ve got to keep up or fall behind” tension that we have resting on our shoulders every single day – know this: You are free to believe. You are free to live. You are gifted in faith to have a Lord who says, I am with you – today and tomorrow – whatever that might bring. You are “freed” by Christ’s precious work on the cross for you. Free to be a slave? Yes that too. But that is also a gift from God for the sake of those we love. We are taught that in Luther’s words. But, more importantly, we are taught that from Jesus: *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* Amen and amen!

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