

October 8, 2017
Sermon for Reformation t-minus 3
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 8:31–36

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 8:31–36 (ESV)

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** ³³

They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Dear friends in Christ...you know, that phrase, "Dear friends in Christ," sounds a bit like the opening verse of our text. Jesus is speaking with "*the Jews who had believed him.*"

Perhaps we can imagine Jesus saying, "my dear friends."

But then something unexpected happens. Jesus challenges these "believers," these "friends," with the fact that they might be too secure in their beliefs.

Their understanding of their beliefs and His understanding of their beliefs were quite different. And He tells them so.

Jesus is like that. He can unsettle and He can disturb, especially people who think they have Christianity all figured out. When Jesus speaks, things happen.

Yes, people are forgiven and comforted and healed.

But they may also be unsettled and challenged and confronted.

So, dear friends in Christ, when you listen to the Word of Christ, don't be surprised if you, too, are sometimes challenged or disturbed. The Spirit of God is at work to bring you comfort and forgiveness and the joy of life in Christ.

But that also means the Spirit may shake our over-confidences, our views, our certainties, and our reliance on the false idols still hollering for our attention.

The theme of this sermon suggests itself from Jesus' own words in our text:

The Truth Will Set You Free.

Just as Jesus' hearers discovered, so we, too, might find that the journey to freedom and peace and joy might include a challenge to our current worldview.

Amy the Lord be with us as we take that journey today.

The hearers of Jesus drew a logical conclusion. They thought Jesus was talking about their relationship with other nations.

We have never been enslaved to anyone. From the days of Abraham and in light of the great rescue from Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, the children of Abraham saw the world in a particular way.

They were free. They were blessed. They were chosen. They were the people of God. Into that certainty comes this challenge from Jesus, *“If you abide in my word, . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

What does he mean? How can we be set free if we are free already?

The world in which we live is not unlike the world of the offspring of Abraham.

We, too, are told and believe that we are free. We act as if we are free.

We live as if we are free. Politicians and others speak of being part of the *free* world. By that, they mean free from the rule of oppressive dictators or oppressive law. We are free to vote in new leaders if our leaders begin to oppress us. We are free to move states and change jobs and travel overseas. We even have freedom of speech, which seems to mean someone else defends our right to say the strangest things sometimes.

But are we really free? Don't we free people still struggle with sin? with addictions? with the temptation to believe that more work or more wealth or more friends or more whatever will give us the peace we long for?

What about you? What are your struggles? Who are your slave masters? What do you wish you were truly free from?

Jesus' Word comes to us too. *“If you abide in my word, . . . the truth will set you free.”*

True freedom has to do with the Word of Christ, not the word of the world or our own self-talk.

The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh speak to us all the time, always trying to convince us of various sources of freedom and peace. But there is yet another voice.

The Voice. And so the real question for us is not whether we can create our own freedoms, such as political freedom or freedom of speech, but whether we are hearing the one Voice that counts, the voice of Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus moves the discussion along as He says:

“...‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin’” (v 34).

The focus of the conversation has moved; it has shifted. “My dear friends,” Jesus says, “I am not talking about your political freedoms; I am talking about being free from the bondage of sin. I am talking about committing sin and being a slave to sin. I am talking about the way life is in relation to a holy God.”

What happens next tells us that the message and teaching of Jesus that followed was very confronting. So much so that in v 48 we read some of the hearers saying, *“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”* And then when Jesus reveals himself as the great *“I am”* in v 58 by saying, *“Before Abraham was, I am,”* we read that they picked up stones to throw at him.

Jesus claimed to be God. They know it. And from their perspective, it is blasphemy.

Before we get too self-righteous about the actions of those hearers, consider what they had just heard. In their view of the world, they are the privileged ones, knowledgeable in religious thought and practices, and in the inner circle of God’s closest friends. And to them, Jesus says, “Think again about your view of the world, of your freedom, your view of God himself.

Freedom has to do with sin and forgiveness of sin, not with family history or privileged position or some special knowledge.”

Today we continue our month long celebration of Reformation—and for the 500th time! More importantly, we celebrate the Good News that salvation is a free gift from God.

We remember texts such as Eph 2:8, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*

Some of us are lifelong Lutherans. Our parents, grand parents and even farther back than that were Lutherans. And we might start to think that folks who care about such things, who celebrate the Reformation year after year, and especially this year, could be described as an inner circle of Jesus’ friends.

But we also need to remember something Luther said, or rather wrote, that triggered a religious conversation on a grand scale, and even today keeps us from becoming puffed up with our own version of family history.

The first of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, which he posted up for all to read and discuss, was this: “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said “repent,” intended that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance.”

Imagine that. Life with God needs repentance, humility, recognizing that we don’t “have it all together.” Life with God for all people, us included, does not depend on our religious heritage or our knowledge or certainty, but with coming before God with a broken and contrite heart. Ps 51:17b says, *“a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*

So we who are free in so many ways are called to think again, just as those children of Abraham were called to think again. And then into our brokenness and our unsettledness comes the healing and comforting light of Christ, the way, the truth, and the life.

Vv 31 and 36 of this Gospel reading in John 8 are like bookends. Let's hear them again.

V 31: *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* And then V 36: *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

Freedom, true freedom, life-giving freedom, is found in Christ and in His Word.

True disciples are not born free; they become free as the Word dwells in them and as they dwell in the Word of Christ.

In the Baptismal Rite, God provides the means for a change to take place for the baptized person. And what words do we hear as God's baptized children? Jesus says,

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6)

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt 11:28)

"This is my body. . . . This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:26, 28)

The truth of Jesus Christ is that there is hope for sinners, for you, for me.

There is forgiveness of sins, for you, for me. There is freedom, true freedom in Christ our Savior. In Christ, we need no longer be slaves to sin, but He sets us free.

We are now sons and daughters of our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, our Lord. As Jesus Himself teaches Nicodemus in John 3, *"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (Jn 3:17).

In Luther's Small Catechism, he offers an explanation of the Creed to help us understand what it means for us. At one point, he says this about Jesus:

[He] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. (Second Article)

Jesus has purchased and freed you!

He frees all who look to him for freedom. He frees us through his innocent suffering and death for our sin, so that in Him we have forgiveness and life and salvation.

It is in this sense that we hear and take to heart Jesus' Word—"the truth shall set you free." And it does. And the joy of salvation is given and restored.

As God's free children, we live now in our daily callings, taking Christ and his truth with us into those callings and asking the Holy Spirit to set others free who might not be truly free yet.

A journey with Jesus and His Word may not be easy, but it is a journey to freedom and a good conscience before God through the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.

Jesus disturbs our own ideas of freedom so we can hear the truth about freedom. He helps us see that what we think is freedom is not real freedom.

Real freedom is not created by us or our plans, our wants, our votes, our laws. It is a gift, received in humility as we confess before God that we are sinners needing forgiveness and freedom.

And a gift freely given by Christ. What a gift! The Son sets you free, and when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

The Truth Will Set You Free

John 8:31-36

- I. Aren't we free already?
- II. Think again.
- III. Freedom is in Christ.