

October 30, 2011  
John 8:31-36

Reformation A  
Discipleship: All about the Truth

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Happy Reformation Day weekend! Tomorrow marks the 494<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses on the Wittenberg Church Door. What were these theses all about? Why did he write them? Today we are going to look at truth. What is truth? What is biblical truth? We will also hear how our lives as disciples are based off of the truth; God's truth!

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483...that is nine years before Columbus sailed to America! In those days the Christian Church no longer based its beliefs on the Bible alone. It invented new doctrines and practices that Jesus and His apostles had NEVER taught. In that time, the church leaders had more gross public sins than that of the common folk; they did not set good examples for the people.

Martin was a very smart young man and being so smart his father enrolled him in the University of Erfurt to study law. He was on his way to becoming a lawyer, until a thunderstorm changed his life...and really church history. A lightning bolt knocked him to the ground and he pledged his life to become monk.

Brother Luther worked to lead a holy life...he prayed until the wee hours of the morning, worked hard, studied constantly and endured much hardship. It didn't help Brother Martin...he tried to keep God's commands perfect...but the more he did the more he felt like a failure. So Brother Martin decides to visit Rome in hopes that would help, but that trip even lead him to greater despair...he saw how worldly and sinfully the pope and cardinals behaved.

Luther's life changed yet again...he would go on to Wittenberg to be a professor, scholar, and preacher. Did he find peace with God? No, not until the head of the local monastery, Johann von Staupitz led Luther to the Bible for answers. Luther discovered in God's Holy Word, the truth, that God's righteousness is a gift to those who believe in Jesus Christ. This righteousness didn't just belong to God, but yet he gave it to His people that were sorry for their sins and believed Christ earned it for them.

Luther discovered the truth and wanted to tell others...but strangely and really sadly enough...the church stood in the way. The church of the day taught about purgatory a place where you cleansed yourself before heaven. Indulgences that could be purchased to take years off your stay in purgatory. Luther searched God's Word but could not find these teachings anywhere and when a man named Tetzel tried selling indulgences near Wittenberg, Luther had enough and wrote the 95 theses and on October 31, 1517 nailed them to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg and the Reformation really began and would change the course of Church History forever.

Today is not a day to worship or even celebrate the life of Martin Luther. Today is really about God's revealed truth. The truth that was first revealed in Jesus Christ and then was written down in His written Word.

Today we continue our series on discipleship and really find that our lives as disciples are based on God's Holy Word, his revealed revelation to us. His revealed truth.

In our Gospel text for today Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, truly you are my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Abide in His Word. Abide...what does that mean? Remain, hold true, read, study, and learn His Word. Live by His Word. Remain faithful to his Word.

Does that just mean bits and pieces of His Word? Absolutely not! It means His whole Word. Really His whole truth. What does abiding in His Word look like in your lives as disciples?

Does it look like what Luther did...preach against the church of his today for teaching false doctrine? Maybe not to that extent, but it might mean reforming your lives to live fully for him. That is exactly what he did...he reformed his life once he saw the truth.

Reforming one's life is difficult thing to do. It means letting the Holy Spirit work in your life to set you free from the sins that hold you down. And we could all list a laundry list of sins that weigh us down, that prevent us from being the disciples that God has called us to be.

It might really be your complacency toward our faith, your laziness, and your lack of desire to do anything to the church. It might be your lack of drive to be a church that is driven with purpose, vision, and mission. It might even be your constant squabble over things. Thoughts of giving up. I can confess to you, that I fall in the same boat as the rest of you, I find myself failing at points and it doesn't just hurt me...it hurts you and it hurts the community and church at large.

I see a need for reform here in this place. I see a need to really look at our purpose and vision of the church. To do it as we abide in God's Word, which is why back in January I issued everyone a challenge to read the entire Bible with me over the course of two years...during the month of November we will journey through the book Psalms and I can tell you what great writings they are. If you have fallen off course, if you see your life falling into despair...pick up God's Holy Word and read it, learn it, study it...for the truth will set you free.

God's truth is the only thing that can set us free...free from our slavery to sin. The Jews that Jesus was speaking to were confused...they didn't think they were slaves to anyone. They didn't quite understand that anyone who sins...is a slave to sin. Christ sets the truth...that a slave doesn't remain in the house forever...but a son does. If we continue to live our lives to sin...we won't be allowed in God's house forever. But if you

abide in His Word...the truth will set you free. The Son will set you free and you will be along with the only Son, heirs of the kingdom of God.

When Luther was in Wittenberg he discovered the truth and he did everything that the Holy Spirit led him to do in speaking the truth...speaking it in love, and sometimes saying the very hard things, because he loved the Church of God and wanted to see them get it right once again.

Martin Luther speaking out against the Roman church of the day almost cost him is very life. As Luther was traveling back home to Wittenberg one night after meeting with Charles V...he was kidnapped by his friend and taken to Wartburg where even though he was lonely, he knew God was with him. He used his time wisely and translated the New Testament into German...the language of the people. And then he left Wartburg and returned to Wittenberg where he shared the gospel message of Jesus Christ. He would also write and write and write some more, and with the invention of the printing press, things were published and spread across the area.

The truth of Jesus Christ was spreading. Isn't it a wonder how God works in such mysterious ways? The truth came into the world at the beginning of the millennium at just the right time. The Pax Romana was happening. The road system in Palestine and Israel was forming...the message of Jesus Christ spread in the first years after his death and resurrection. And the Reformation of the church happened at the right time when the printing press was invented which led to many others hearing the truth of God's Word.

The truth of Jesus Christ has spread since the days after the death and resurrection, through the Reformation and to today and will continue. I pray that God's truth continues to be spread even in our community today. The truth that is written in God's Holy Word, the truth that has been spread for all time, the truth that Luther discovered some 500 years ago that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The truth which our church stands. Our church stands on sola gratia (grace alone), sola fides (Faith alone), and sola scriptura (scripture alone).

We give thanks to God for the truth and that this truth will set you free, just like this truth set me free 28 years ago today when I was washed clean in the Waters of Holy Baptism by the Blood of the Lamb. The truth can also set you free—for if you are slave you will not remain in the house, but if you are a son and an heir you will love in the house forever.

May God grant that truth today and that you can once discover what the entire Word of God says. And remember that our lives as disciples are always based on God's truth.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen*