

Freedom From and Freedom For

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Reformation: Year A: John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Romans 3:19-28 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. ²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

This Reformation Day is not about how Lutherans or Lutheran theology or Rev. Martin Luther is better than other Christians. It is about God freeing us – freedom from precisely the need to justify and establish ourselves on our own. At the same time, Christian freedom is freedom for life in relationship with God and each other because we believe we have been created for just such relationships and cannot be either whole or free apart from them.

God’s grace and peace be with us this day! Amen

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed,” Jesus says. Sounds fabulous, doesn’t it? But what exactly does it mean?

Before we get to Jesus, let’s begin with what we know. We like to think we are free, yet, perhaps we are not as free as we think. Call to mind anything you and I are bound by. Cell phones, work, worry, illness or disease. This endless running of tasks and busy-ness. Then there is this ache we have in our deepest selves to love and be loved. We then distract ourselves and try to fill that ache with every sort of temporary fix: TV and Hollywood stars, entertainment, food, sex, knowledge, news, excessive alcohol and drugs, social media, hobbies, or work. We’re not as free as we think.

Yet, this concept of freedom is a prized possession in our country. Our forebearers founded this nation on freedom. It was the concept of freedom from taxation, from regulation and independence from the mother country, Great Britain. In the centuries since then, we’ve taken independence to whole new levels. Freedom today means we can be self-made women and men. We strive to be free from other people telling us what to do or believe. “Don’t tell me what to think!” We want freedom from responsibility, accountability, relationships, aging and even death!

Martin Luther wasn’t talking about a national kind of freedom when he tried to start a conversation by nailing the 95 theses to the church door in Whittenburg. He and the other reformers were inviting Christians into a new kind of freedom. Freedom from church officials who taught that one earned God’s grace by actions and deeds and paying fees. Luther wanted people to experience freedom for their own relationship with God exempt from church regulations and bureaucracy.

So what was Jesus talking about? If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

The Jews Jesus was speaking with were Jews who believed in Him. Jesus said, “If you continue in my word...you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” Immediately, they take Jesus literally and think He is speaking of slavery.

“We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves.” How quickly they forget their time in slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt! Talk about re-writing history!

Jesus redirects them to a much deeper kind of slavery. The slavery we inhabit as sinners. This kind of slavery goes beyond just the negative actions we inflict upon

others. This slavery is a spiritual slavery; chains and shackles inside our spirits. It is an existential slavery. This kind of sin as Rev. David Lose says, is a, ‘corrosive insecurity that inhibits us from trusting God and each other and instead drives us to secure our destiny on our own terms.’ⁱ

Corrosive insecurity that inhibits us from trusting God and each other. Instead, this sin drives us to secure destiny on our own terms. That sounds like a self-made woman or man. Independent and free of God and anybody else!

Here’s the irony. None of us are free apart from God. None of us can even live or breathe without God. Respirators keep people breathing. That’s simply mechanics. With our very first cry as babies entering the world and our very last gasp on our death beds, God gives us each breath we take. We are completely dependent upon God. Not independent from God. Completely dependent upon God.

So if the Son makes us free we will be free indeed. Jesus was telling them that “Christian freedom is freedom *from* precisely the need to justify and establish ourselves on our own.”ⁱⁱ God knows who we are at all times. We don’t have to make excuses for our sin.

A family had gone to a neighbor’s house for an evening meal and relaxation. The mother noticed that her daughter and the neighbor’s daughter weren’t around. They weren’t in any of the rooms on the first floor. So she climbed the stairs to the other little girl’s bedroom. The bedroom door was closed, so the mother knocked and called the two girls names. “Kristin! Jamie!” Right away, a little voice answered, “We aren’t doing anything bad in here!”

We don’t have to make excuses or justify, or brag to God about anything we’ve done or not done. We don’t need to behave perfectly in order to make God love us. God knows us intimately.

Luther and the reformers proclaimed the radical message that we are saved by faith alone, by grace alone and by scripture alone. God saves by faith alone, by grace alone and by scripture alone.

God understands we live in this state of sin. God forgives us, frees us, releases us, unshackles us from sin. What does this mean? We can worship God without fear! You and I do not obtain this freedom by anything we do. It has already been obtained for us through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus creates this freedom

from having to grovel before God. Instead, we get to sing and dance before God, in thanksgiving for what Jesus has done. We are **free from** having to always make our case before God.

At the same time, (while we are freed from) Christian freedom is **freedom for life in relationship with God** and each other. God created us to be in relationship with God. Remember the creation story in Genesis? God created humankind. Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness! (Gen 1:26) Ta-da! God could have stopped creating with the birds and cattle and fish of every kind and every creeping thing. God didn't! God desired relationship with humans. We are created for relationship with God.

Remember that ache I spoke of earlier? That deep ache inside to love and be loved? St. Augustine wrote in his Confessions: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Just as our souls are enslaved to sin. Our souls also yearn to live in this freedom. The freedom God provides us is spiritual freedom. Jesus allows us to live freely with God.

We are also created for relationships with others because we 'cannot be either whole or free apart from them.'ⁱⁱⁱ Paul in 1 Corinthians writes about believers as a body. He says when one part of the body hurts, we all hurt. When one part of the body is joyful, everyone rejoices. We cannot live as if we were all an eye, for how could we hear? We cannot live as if we were only hands, for how could we walk?

This interdependent life we live, this fabulous inter-connectedness we experience, compels us to live for one another. We simply cannot be whole without one another. Which is a radically different thought than, "I don't need you, don't tell me what to do." We can't be whole without each other. Because we are freed in Christ to love, we want our neighbor to not only survive but thrive. We write letters of advocacy. We gladly pay a little extra in our heating bill so every house can be warm in winter. We collect food because Jesus said, 'the poor will always be with you.' (Mt 26:11)

On this Reformation weekend, we give God thanks for being freed from having to justify ourselves before God and for being freed for life with God and life with others. Amen!

ⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/reformation-day/commentary-on-john-831-36-6>

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