

Sermon for November 11, 2013 – Reformation Sunday

John 8:31-36 (AAT)

Theme: Live in God's Word.

- 1) *Then you will know the Truth,*
- 2) *And the Truth will free you.*

<sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, "If you live in My Word, you are truly My disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will free you." <sup>33</sup> "We are Abraham's descendants," they answered Him, "and have never been anyone's slaves. How can you say, 'You'll be freed?' "* <sup>34</sup> *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered them, "everyone who lives in sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> A slave doesn't stay in the home forever. A son stays forever. <sup>36</sup> If, then, the Son frees you, you will really be free.*

What are we celebrating when we celebrate the Reformation? Are we merely celebrating the birth of another Christian "tradition"? Is Reformation Day just an ethnic holiday like St. Patrick's Day – a day we go to Church and afterwards drink a beer with our friends saying: "It's good to be Lutheran?"

Now there is nothing wrong with having a beer today, but I sincerely hope that our ideas of celebrating the Reformation are not so trivial. Today is an important day! Today we remember God restoring His pure Gospel to the world. Celebrating the Reformation is a celebration of God's Word and the salvation we received through faith in all its wonderful promises.

And so my sermon has very little to do with Martin Luther and congratulating ourselves on being Lutheran. Rather it is an encouragement to find such joy in the Gospel that you do not become complacent and allow sin and false belief to rob you of your salvation. Listen to Jesus encouragement this morning and: **Live in God's Word.** 1) *Then you will know the Truth, and 2) the Truth will free you.*

Part One: Then you will know the truth.

Our sermon text for this morning finds Jesus teaching a crowd of Jews that He is the Light of the world – our Savior from sin. The Pharisees challenged him, saying that, without witnesses, his testimony about himself is invalid. Jesus answered this challenge by pointing out that both Scripture and God the Father himself testify to the fact that He is the Messiah. Jesus goes on to prophesy the kind of death He would die and, as Jesus spoke, many of the Jews started to put their faith in Him. Jesus encourages them in their newly found faith by saying:

*"If you live in My Word, you are truly My disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will free you."*

In other words, Jesus is saying: "Don't just make a start of listening to my Word and not continue studying it – believing that all the encouragement life and salvation I have to offer can be said in this short time. Live in my Word. Let my teachings be the first thing you think about in the morning and your last thoughts at night. Take the advice my Father gave you through Moses, when He said: *The instructions I give you today write in your mind; impress their meaning on your children; talk about them when you sit at home, walk along the road, lie down, and get up. Bind them on your arm to remind you; wear them as bands on your forehead; write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, AAT)

Jesus connects “living in His Word: with discipleship. The word “disciple” means “student.” Students study, and so do disciples of Jesus. They “live” in God’s Word - they want to take every opportunity that presents itself to learn about God and His relationship with them.

And what is the benefit disciples of Jesus enjoy, as they live in the Word? Jesus says that they will know the truth. What truth will disciples of Jesus know? They will know the answers to the most important questions people could ever ask. They will know the true God and the truth about man and the universe. They will know the true condition of the human heart – that, outside of Christ, it is evil. They will know the true eternal danger we are in because of sin, and the true love God has for mankind in sending Jesus to save us from this danger. Those who live in God’s word will know the only true way of salvation – through faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. They will have hope in the true heaven that awaits them and find true purpose and meaning in life now as they live thankful lives of obedience to God – confessing that His will is always good and His Word is true.

And this truth, the Gospel, will set them free – free from the eternal consequences of sin, and free to serve God in all righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. But more on that later.

Jesus wants his disciples to live in His Word. So let me ask: do you live in His Word? Do you take all the opportunities God places in front of you to learn about Him? Do you come to worship regularly and attend Bible Study? Do you read your Bible at home, or at least review your Catechism?

It is possible that some of you might be thinking: “there goes pastor again, on his favorite hobby horse – talking about Bible Class and reading the Bible at home. Why does he keep pushing these things? It’s not like I didn’t learn all this stuff when I was a kid. I’ve been a life-long member of this church. I went to school and was confirmed here. I know what the Bible says – or at least enough of it.”

Now, God willing none of you are thinking this, but if you are - consider how such thoughts are similar to the statements the Jews make to Jesus.

Part Two: And the truth will set you free.

*“We are Abraham’s descendants,” they answered Him, “and have never been anyone’s slaves. How can you say, ‘You’ll be freed?’ ”*

The Jews trusted their heritage to save them. They were children of Abraham – how could Jesus even insinuate that they were in danger of being slaves to anyone or anything. They had the Law. They were God’s chosen people. Of course they were going to be saved. Little did they perceive that they were as much spiritual slaves to the devil as the Gentiles around them.

*“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered them, “everyone who lives in sin is a slave to sin.*

The Jews, just like the Gentiles, were slaves to sin. Because our human nature has been so corrupted with sin, we can’t even begin to do the good God wants us to do. Sin is slavery and it enslaves all mankind. No one can love the Lord or His neighbor the way God demands. Sin makes us selfish. We do things only if we think we can reap some benefit from our actions. The apostle Paul describes our slavery to sin most accurately when he writes: *I don’t do the good things I want to do, but I do the evil I don’t want to do. Now if I do what I don’t want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it but sin living in me. So I find this to be a rule: When I want to do what is right, evil is there with me. In my inner being I delight in God’s Law, but all through my body I see another law fighting against the Law in my mind and making me a prisoner to the*

*sin ruling my body. What a miserable man I am! Who will rescue me from the body that brings me to this death? Thank God — He does it through our Lord Jesus Christ! (Romans 7:19-25, AAT)*

Brothers and sisters in Christ – just as being a descendant of Abraham did not help the Jews overcome their addiction and slavery to sin, so neither does our heritage of being “Lutheran”. It doesn’t matter how long you have been a member of this congregation; without Christ you are still slaves to sin and, as Jesus says, *a slave doesn’t stay in the home forever*. In other words, if we remain slaves to sin, we will be cast out of God’s house – his holy Church – forever.

*But a son stays forever. If, then, the Son frees you, you will really be free.*

Jesus is the one and only, holy Son of God. He lived the life of perfect obedience to God’s law that we all failed to live. He took our sins upon himself and died in order to suffer the punishment we deserved for our sin. He rose again to show that the sins of every single person on this earth have been paid for in full. God offers this forgiveness to all – to be received through faith. If Jesus sets you free from sin, then you are free indeed. The condemnation of the law no longer stands against you. There is nothing you must add to earn your salvation.

Now, before we let our sinful natures corrupt our understanding of this freedom, let us clarify an important point. We are not free to disobey God. Sin is never freedom; it is slavery. When we lived under sin, we were unable to please God. Why? Because the shackles of our sinfulness kept us from doing the good God demanded from us. But Jesus has set us free from this slavery to sin through faith in Him. We are now free to live as children of God – obeying the LORD, not in order to earn his love and favor, but because we have it! In Christ, we are God’s children. We want to please our heavenly Father because of the relationship we have with him in Christ; as Luther writes in the Small Catechism: *[Jesus] redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil . . . that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

And in order to remain in the freedom Jesus gives us, we have to remain in Christ. And the only way we can remain in Christ is if we remain in Jesus’ holy and precious Word which calls us to repentance and reassures us of Christ’s forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Live in God’s Word. I don’t care how long you have been a member of Immanuel, who confirmed you or how much instruction you had as a child – the simple truth is this: if you do not remain in the Word – reviewing and trusting the Gospel of Christ – then you are not a disciple of Christ. You are not a Christian. Jesus himself says so much, when He says: ***If you live in My Word, you are truly My disciples.*** And if we don’t live in His Word? Then that which Jesus would later say to the Jews would also apply to us: *A child of God listens to what God says. You don’t listen to Him because you’re not God’s children.*” (John 8:47, AAT) And also: *If anyone doesn’t stay in Me, he’s thrown away like a branch and dries up. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.* (John 15:6, AAT)

Live in God’s Word and this condemnation will not befall you. And why not? Because if you live in God’s Word (gladly hearing and meditating on the Gospel) you will know the truth – Jesus himself who is our salvation. And the truth – Jesus himself – will set you free from all sin, and give you eternal life with Him in paradise. This is most certainly true. Amen.