

## Reformation Sunday - 10/29/2017

*Text: John 8:31-36; Romans 3:19-28*

Today is the day when we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Or at least, the 500th anniversary of when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on indulgences at the Castle Church in Wittenberg; maybe he nailed to the door, maybe he glued them. Luther also mailed a copy of those 95 Theses to Bishop Albert of Brandenburg, which history shows is truly the action that got the attention of the Roman Catholic leadership, and then of course everything else happened that happened.

It's all fine and good to remember this, and even to celebrate a bit, but the temptation is to put all our attention on Luther and take our eyes off of Jesus. And that is a betrayal of what the Reformation was all about. When we lose sight of Jesus – when we spend all our time talking about, celebrating, rejoicing in, feeling triumphant about *everything* but Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of the sin of the world – then we cease to be Christians and we're as guilty as the medieval Roman Catholic church that Luther spent much of his lifetime correcting.

Now I'm not seeking to be a grouchy-pants about all this. I *love* history, I *love* Luther, I *love* our Lutheran theology. I hope you do, too; Or as long as God grants that you have to put up with me, that you'll spend that time growing to love history and Luther and Lutheran theology just as much as me, if not more. Nevertheless, I want this day to be just as much a sabbath for you as any other, and that means we must make use of God's Word today, which makes this day and your life and even your very heart holy and perfect in God's sight. Luther's concern, and mine, is that we remain focused on the Word of God which reveals to us, give to us, brings to us, faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. We'd be wrong if today was all about Luther. We're likewise wrong when any day is about something other than Jesus Christ setting us free from our sins so that we are holy before God by grace through faith in Christ, and therefore free to serve our neighbor in love.

Which, of course, is precisely what Jesus is teaching us in today's Gospel reading. **"Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,"** Jesus says. He's talking about you. You sin. Therefore you are a slave to sin. It must be noted that this doesn't just mean that you sin merely by accident, or unknowingly, or out of weakness. You sin by design, too. Your conscience tries to speak up and say "No, don't do it," and yet you do it anyway. Full knowledge, on purpose, repeatedly.

Your new man speaks in your conscience and in your mind to stop gossiping or that what you're saying isn't exactly true and it's going to hurt someone, and then we notice how everyone really is interested in what we're saying or is finally paying attention to us and so we think, "why not?" And out it comes, out of our mouths, those words which murder the reputations of our neighbors.

Or you're on your computer and a racy ad comes up and suddenly your new man is warning your sinful flesh to look away, don't click, don't search for those images, and yet that familiar rush has come over you and you remember how exciting it will be, even for a few minutes, and you go ahead and do it.

This isn't accidental. Perhaps the initial temptation was accidental, but then your sinful, corrupted will figured out that you can just do this and then ask for forgiveness again and Jesus will give it, because He's always willing to forgive. The Pastor will stand up here again on Sunday and announce to you that your sin is forgiven again. And of course it really is.

The fact is, if you are ruled by sin, if you can't help yourself, then you don't have fellowship with Christ. **"Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."** That's the harsh truth that Luther faced. He saw that his sin kept working at him, that he'd give in, that he'd slip up and be right back in the muck and mire again. And again. And again.

And that sounds familiar, doesn't it? Isn't that how it goes for you. It goes that way for me. Paul writes in Romans 7, **"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."** See, you are the latest in a long line whose conscience is guided by the forgiveness of your sins and the will of God which on the one hand you want to keep and yet...here you find yourself sinning again, falling back into that bondage and slavery. Paul sees it in himself and he cries out to God, **"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death!"**

The thing to celebrate about the Reformation is that Luther rediscovered, and he and his fellow workers reintroduced through writing, preaching, and teaching, the emancipating fact that Jesus doesn't leave you in your bondage to sin. Jesus doesn't leave you despairing that you're lost forever. Jesus doesn't leave you thinking that you have to make amends with God.

Jesus says, **"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** Paul writes, **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."**

Jesus has set you free on His cross. There, God put him forward to shed his blood, as a propitiation—an atoning sacrifice—for your sins. Christ's life given there on Calvary pays the ransom to free you forever from your wretched master, Sin.

Jesus has set you free in the font. Jesus baptized you, bringing you with Him into His grave and into His resurrection. **"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."** Sons remain in the house forever. And that's what you are now: sons, heirs according to promise. Your dwelling place is not in death but is instead in life, with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity.

Jesus sets you free here, now. Even as you again find yourself enslaved again, hear these words which are the very heart of soul of the Christian Church and the things which matters most about the Reformation, the chief thing which we celebrate today and forever: **"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God."** And He has called me here to this place as His man to announce to you that, *In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* You are free.

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