

“IN THE WORD, JESUS GIVES REAL FREEDOM!”

John 8:31-36

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus. {Rom 15:5-6}

Dear Recipients of the Reformation heritage,

Today we live in a culture and a country that is passionate about “freedom”. The first passion that comes to mind is the freedom we have as citizens of the U.S. to worship the Triune God and be protected by laws and from those who wish to harm us. Men and women have given their precious lives on the battlefields of history to preserve those freedoms.

But a puzzling trend that is unfolding is the desire to abuse freedom by calling for the freedom to do as we wish, regardless of whether it’s right or wrong, decent or derogatory. Two weeks ago, Pastor M. preached on marriage and effects of last summer’s Supreme Court ruling as to the definition of marriage. That ruling was applauded because now it gave the freedom to change God’s definition of marriage to a human definition to love whomever you want – even if it’s completely unnatural. We see protesters shouting on the streets of our big cities using the freedom to protest as a license to call police officers, who protect them and us, this despicable term “*pigs in a blanket*”. Is that really the freedom that soldiers died for?

Today is Reformation Day, the 498th anniversary of Martin Luther using his freedom to pound 95 theses on the Castle Door in Wittenberg on October 31st denouncing the errors and blunders of the Roman Catholic Church. All Luther was after was to restore the Gospel to the center of the Church’s teachings which was really nothing new. The O.T. theme was the coming Messiah. The N.T. theme was the Messiah who had come to be the Savior of all. The Reformation wasn’t really about Luther – it was about securing real freedom and where you find it.

So we celebrate the Reformation and praise God for the confessors who have gone before us and what He accomplished through them. But we also want to use the Reformation as a springboard to always remembers that...

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1. Freedom from sin
2. Freedom to serve

1

Much of John, chapter 8 is a verbal battle between Jesus and Jews pumped up by the Pharisees who were questioning Jesus’ message. Jesus said: “**I am the Light of the world**” (Jn 8:12) meaning that He was the only true source to lead us through this sinful dark world and that anyone who followed Him would not walk in darkness, but would have the light of life. IE: Jesus was **the only one to give real freedom from sin**. But before his lips stopped moving, the Pharisees challenged him claiming “**Your testimony is not valid.**” (Jn 8:13) Some believed Jesus, some didn’t.

To those Jews who had believed him, Jesus said: If you **hold to my teaching**, you are really (surely, actually) **my disciples**. **Holding to Jesus’ teaching** means *staying with, relying on, living in Jesus’ teaching*. The idea here is of an action that is constant and active. You aren’t a spectator to Jesus’ teachings, you are a participant. **Holding to Jesus’ teaching** means a disciple puts man-made teachings and human reason that deviates from God’s Word aside. **Holding to Jesus’ teaching** means a disciple will “hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” God Word on a regular basis. **Holding to Jesus’ teaching** means a disciple will apply in his/her life what the Spirit has put into the heart. The apostle James once wrote: **Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.** (Ja 1:22-4)

Then you will know the truth, and truth will set you free. Jesus wanted these Jews to know that what he was telling them was the truth they needed for real freedom from the slavery of sin. This is the freedom from the power and curse of sin. The Bible says: **the soul that sins is the one who will die.** {Ez 18:4} How does one escape that curse? How do you bypass the threat of God’s righteous anger and just punishment for every thought, word, and deed that violates God’s commandments?

Some Jews saw it a different way. They claimed that their descendancy which traced back to Abraham provided them some perks. “**We’ve never been slaves of anyone, so how can you say that we shall be set free?**” We already have freedom. Really? What about **Egypt**? What about **Babylon**? And what about **the Roman government** now? True, they were Abraham’s descendants, but don’t think you are automatically children of God. They were living under laws, laws, and more laws. They had no freedom under the law, only slavery. They were drowning spiritually and either didn’t know it or wouldn’t accept it! **Everyone who sins is a slave to sin and a slave has no permanent place in the family.** Jesus’ words are saying that when you are a slave to sin, there’s no peace with God. You are put out from his family.

For a long time, Martin Luther struggled with finding real freedom. As a monk, he did all his “Hail Mary’s”, tried to keep his monastic vows, fulfill all his works. But he still was a slave to sin and he couldn’t find freedom or relief from the prospect of dying and facing God as an angry judge. For Luther, the only way to get close to God was to pray to Mary and the saints, and pay your indulgences: a piece of paper that said your sins are forgiven, that said your Grandma, father, or brother who just died can escape from purgatory and go to heaven because of your prayers and payments. That’s all Luther knew to hold on to, but that wasn’t real freedom.

Thanks to the encouragement of Luther’s mentor, Johann Staupitz, he began to read and study the Bible. The Spirit opened Luther’s eyes and heart to discovering that it’s not about him working toward God, but Christ coming to him. He studied Romans where Paul wrote that in the Gospel, **a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”** (Rom1:16-17) And freedom’s door flung wide open! Jesus kept the Law perfectly and died innocently. He secured that forgiveness from the slavery of sin that no one could. God gives real freedom to every sinner as a gift of His grace. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, there is no punishment from God because He paid it. There is no purgatory because heaven awaits every believer at death. There is no judgment because sin has been removed!

That’s what Luther now held to. That’s what we hold to. Jesus is our Savior. The gospel reveals His love and mercy in the Word. And that Word works faith in heart. **Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** {Rom 10:17} The Word keeps faith alive because that is the means the Spirit uses to strengthen our hearts enabling us to hold to the truth **that gives us real freedom from sin.**

2

What does the Reformation mean for us Lutherans today? It means the Word, which reveals the real truth how **Jesus gives freedom from sin**, is what we hold to because that also gives us the **FREEDOM TO SERVE**.

If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. What a huge difference for Luther to discover that Jesus set him free from being a slave to sin. He believed that God now accepted Him into his family with the **freedom to serve him**. For the next 32 years, Luther was free to serve the Lord by preaching, teaching, composing, writing, battling errors, debating false theologians – all to defend the Reformation truth that **IN THE WORD, JESUS GIVES REAL FREEDOM**.

We need the Reformation today not just to celebrate Luther’s work, but to guide us in our Christian life. Before we look down on those Jews who figured they were pretty well set spiritually because of their past, might the thought cross our minds? **“I don’t need church every week. I don’t need Bible class; I learned it all years ago in Confirmation.** Someone once said: “I was born Lutheran, confirmed Lutheran, married Lutheran, and I’ll be buried Lutheran”. When asked, “Well, don’t you think you need to go to church once in a while?” the Lutheran responded: “WHY?”

How would you answer? We are living in an age when Lutherans are taking their Reformation blessings for granted. Real discipleship is a life-long pursuit, not a two year course. We don’t want to become like **some empty Christian peanuts**: the shell is there, but there’s nothing of substance inside!

Reformation reminds us that in the Word, Jesus gives real freedom: freedom from sin, from fear, from death, from slavery. It also gives us freedom to serve. We confess a Savior who earned the very forgiveness we need to get to heaven on the cross. The gospel in The Means of grace gives us these precious gifts of Christ. The Word is all about Jesus and what the Father gives through him. Jesus is that **truth that sets us free** to serve him by hearing His Word, participating in His Supper, looking for opportunities to grow in faith, answering the call to help in areas where we are gifted. No matter what the task, no matter what your background, no matter how blessed, use the freedom of the cross of Christ and the love He showed there to serve God with an active, living, continuous faith that treasures God’s Word dearly.

This is why we have a Reformation service – not just to remember something that happened nearly 500 years ago, but to remember what God’s Word does for us today. Stay in the Word where **Jesus gives real freedom**. **So people of God---go in peace and hold to the truth that sets you free. AMEN**