

Sunday: Reformation Sunday

Date: October 25, 2020

Text: John 8:31-36

Title: Freedom is Free

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

On October 31, 1517, the first salvo was unleashed in a battle for freedom. This battle was not a war marked by huge battles with armies numbering in the thousands aligned against each other. It was not a war full of cavalry, archers, swords, and shields. It was however a conflict of epic proportions. Thousands of human lives would be lost, but the result of the struggle would result in the salvation of millions. While the battles of the Reformation have ebbed, the conflict has not ceased.

Long before that October day 503 years ago, every human alive was free. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were absolutely free. They were given dominion over the Earth and everything in it. They were free of animosity, greed, and fear. They had all their needs provided for and lacked nothing needed for a perfect life. They even had God the Father to walk with and talk to as he walked in the Garden with them. Their freedom was complete and limited only by their humanness. Their freedom went so far as to allow them to make bad choices

When the evil one, engaged the perfect couple, he used their total freedom to tempt them to disregard the life given to them and seek something more. He lured them to seek to be equal with God. Through his twisting of God's word and his beguiling speech, he convinced them to take and eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. At that moment, they became aware of good and evil. They recognized the evil that they had done in violating the trust God has place in them and seeking to usurp the Creator's place. They became enslaved to their corrupted desires and mired in sin. Sin, death and the devil invaded paradise, and captured mankind, enslaving them by means of accusation, condemnation, and fear. Paradise was lost. Freedom was lost. A situation that has plagued the world to this day.

However, our Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, refused to abandon our fallen first parents and all their descendants. God in His great love promised them

a return to freedom. Freedom from sin, death, and the devil. He promised them a Messiah, who would crush the deceiver and give his life for fallen creation.

Two thousand years ago, God sent his son to take on human flesh for the redemption of the world. Jesus, true God and true man, was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of the promise given to Adam and Eve as they were cast out of the Garden. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus restored true freedom to humanity.

In a shadowy reflection of the atoning sacrifice to come, God gave to the children of Abraham the Law at Mt. Sinai along with the sacrifices to be made for failure to be obedient to God. The shedding of blood, in payment for sin, was the means of being reconciled to God. This method of restoration stayed in place until the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, gave his life, shed his blood, as the full and final payment for the sins of mankind, past, present, and future. Instead of being a comfort for troubled souls, the Law became a burden. As humans are prone to do, the Law became a system for working one's way to a restored relationship with God. This became yet another enslaving tool of Satan the accuser.

The inability of man to remain faithful to the promise of the Messiah, resulted in more laws, practices and procedures being implemented. By the time Jesus was born, people were burdened by the religious authorities who were quick to point out deficiencies and violation of the laws instituted. Jesus challenged these innovations as he ministered to the people of Israel, while proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for us restored us to a right relationship with God the Father. In his death he restored us to life. In his resurrection he paved the way for our bodily resurrection and life in the new heaven and the new earth. In his ascension to the throne room of heaven, he establishes his reign over all the earth as his enemies were made a footstool under his feet.

After Peter proclaimed the message of salvation on Pentecost, the church grew and grew. The people freed from the burden of the law lived in the joy of their salvation, even when faced with persecution and death.

Over time, Satan twisted the good news of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It can't possibly be that easy, he would whisper in people's ears. There has to be something more to it. You need to do something to show God you are

worthy of salvation. It is the quid pro quo of salvation. You do something for God, he does something for you. You do a little more for God, he gives you a little more. The burdens of meriting salvation became a law that enslaved people once again. As the years rolled by the work that needed to be done to merit salvation became impossible to satisfy in this life. People's sins earn wrath faster than they could work it off. In response, the idea of purgatory was put forth, creating a way to work off your debts to God after you died. Then came indulgences to reduce the time in purgatory. The cycle of enslavement to sin was never ending.

Frustrated by the burdens carried about by himself and the members of his church, an Augustinian Monk, searched the scriptures for comfort. How could any sinful person satisfy a perfect, righteous, and just God?

Into the darkness of this fallen world, sagging under the oppression of satanic delusion, God sent his Holy Spirit to that Monk and opened his eyes to the truth of the Scriptures. Martin Luther encountered Paul's Letter to the Romans, through the eyes of faith. He recognized that no man could satisfy God by their works or through obedience to the Law. Humans are flawed, broken, corrupt down to their very core. We are by nature sinful and unclean as we confessed earlier this morning. We have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed. We have sinned against God by the things we have done and the things we have left undone. The plight of King David is our plight. We like David can confess to God,

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalm 51:3-4)

David pleads for mercy, seeking forgiveness and restoration:

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:9-12).

In our Epistle reading today, Paul writes of God doing exactly what David prayed for.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole

world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For these is no distinction: 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, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

It is not our doing, it was never our doing, that brought salvation. It was the work of God. Only He could meet the requirements of the Law. The Law pointed to the need for outside help. The prophets foretold the coming of the one anointed by God to redeem us. Jesus speaks to us of the freedom he gives us.

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” It is the truth of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross that sets us free. It is faith in the promise of redemption fulfilled in Christ that sets us free. It is trust in God who kept his promises in Jesus that results in our being justified by his grace, an absolutely free gift. In Christ’s atoning sacrifice, God hides his face from our sins and blots out all our iniquities.

The accuser, Satan, recoiled in horror at the resurrection of Jesus. He worked diligently and relentlessly to put people back under the Law. He slowly progressed through the ages until Jesus put his heel on the head of the Serpent Satan, exerting his power over the world that is his kingdom. God opened the eyes of Dr. Luther to see the light of salvation clearly in the scriptures. He then shined that light into the darkness of this sin shrouded world to restore hope and joy in the gift of the Savior. From Wittenberg, the gospel burst forth to free men from slavery to sin. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

The shackles of oppression began to lift from mankind once again. It is not what you do, but what God does for you. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the work of God for you and me. It is given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, both written and in the flesh. It is the unmerited gift of grace poured out on a world that has sinned against God. It is poured out every day for people held in bondage to sin. It is the hope delivered to sin sick lives. It is Christ speaking forgiveness into our lives. It is Christ for you, Christ for me, Christ for all.

The initial salvo launched from Wittenberg began the battle for the proper place of the Gospel in the Church and in the world. The doctrine of our Church is the Gospel. By the grace of God, we are declared righteous on account of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

It is not what we do. It is not about works. It is not about merit. It is solely Christ who frees us from bondage to sin, death, and the devil. When Christ says “You are forgiven” it is done. The very words do what they say. When we abide in Jesus’ Word, we know the truth and that truth sets us free.

We hang onto this freedom through the faith we are given by Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit we are strengthened in faith and drawn closer to God. When we fall into sin, when the shackles of slavery begin to tighten their grip on us, we hear the words of Jesus, who speaks forgiveness and freedom into our lives. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

May this unmerited gift of grace grow and flourish in your hearts to life eternal.

Amen.