

Pastor Gail Duba
Sun. October 25, 2020

A Glory Revealed in Liberty

Reformation
John 8:31-41

It is with a sad and heavy heart, that I begin my message to you this morning. This is our first Sunday together since our dear friend and talented organist, choir director, Hilary Hall has left us & gone to be with God. She is probably playing the organ and directing a choir of angels, even as we speak. We can have faith as Jesus gave us his promise in John 14, that he has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us so that where he is, we may be also. Jesus went on to say, "And you know the way to the place where I am going." And his wonderful, questioning disciple, Thomas said "No, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replied, both to Thomas and to every disciple in the 2 centuries since, with the wonderful and among the most comforting words in the Bible "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life "

And now I will share with you the reason I chose to preach on the Reformation texts. As you all know, I am a Lutheran pastor, born and baptized a Lutheran, confirmed in my faith as a Lutheran, married my husband David by a Lutheran pastor at a Lutheran camp where I'd gone as a junior high kid. So as your interim rector, we really don't know how many more years I will have the great honor of serving this congregation. I could be 6 more months or it could be 3 more years! But as Episcopalian broke away from the Catholic church as well, I wanted you to have a bit more understanding of the meaning of being a reforming church. You will note, I did not say, a reformed church, but a reforming church. In order to be a relevant church, a meaningful church, we always need to be searching out God's truths, the wisdom of Scripture, and the tenets of Jesus, because as Christian disciples, **WE FOLLOW CHRIST JESUS**, crucified & risen.

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben & died on February 18, 1546. His father owned several copper mines. He had great plans for Luther to attend Law School & then help with the running of the mines. One day as Luther was traveling back to University he was in a pouring rain with lightning and thunder. He made a pledge to St. Anne & to God, that if he did not die in that storm, he would become a priest. His father was not happy. But after being ordained into the priesthood in 1507, he still had doubts about the way God was perceived by ordinary people as & angry vengeful. He received his Doctor of Theology was assigned to teach at the seminary in Wittenburg. He was an important figure in the Reformation. He came to reject teachings & practices of the Roman Catholic Church; in particular, he disputed the view on indulgences, sale of pardon for sins. Luther proposed an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his Ninety-five Theses of 1517. His refusal to renounce his writings at the

demand of [Pope Leo X](#) in 1520 & the [Emperor Charles V](#) at the [Diet of Worms](#) in 1521 his [excommunication](#) by the [pope](#) & condemnation as an [outlaw](#) by [Roman Emperor](#).

Luther taught that [salvation](#) & consequently, [eternal life](#) are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's [grace](#) through the believer's [faith](#) in [Jesus Christ](#) as redeemer from sin. His [theology](#) challenged the authority & office of the pope by teaching that the [Bible](#) is the [only source](#) of [divinely revealed](#) knowledge, & considers all baptized Christians to be a [holy priesthood](#). Those who identify with these, and all of Luther's wider teachings, were called [Lutherans](#), though Luther insisted on *Christian* or *Evangelical* as the only acceptable names for individuals who professed Christ.

Liberation in Christ through faith was the freedom that transformed Luther.

His [translation of the Bible](#) into the German language made it more accessible to the laity, an event that had a tremendous impact on both the church and German culture. It influenced the writing of an English translation, the [Tyndale Bible](#). His [hymns influenced the development](#) of singing in Protestant churches. His marriage to [Katharina von Bora](#), a former nun, set a model for the practice of [clerical marriage](#), allowing Protestant [clergy](#) to marry.

So now let's look at the text for today. Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one. How is it that you say, 'You will be made free'!" They answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." - John 8:31-36 (RSV)

This short passage of Scripture used to elude me. Being trained in the Reformation tradition, I was used to the ideas of guilt and forgiveness, of rebellious alienation and reconciliation. But it took some time for the third major way the Bible views Christ's work for us to sink in. This is strange in a way, because it had been in front of my eyes every time I studied the Small Catechism. The first part is this: "I believe that Jesus Christ -true God ...& true man... is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person."

So far, so good. In these words, Luther has brought out the Scriptural revelation that we were lost like sheep, but the Good Shepherd rescued us. We also stood condemned by the Law and were under God's wrath, but Jesus fulfilled the Law for us and absorbed God's wrath against sin at Calvary. These things are known to every child of the Reformation, whether Lutheran, Calvinist or Episcopalian. What, then, was my problem? Notice what comes next in the Catechism:

"He has freed me from sin, death, & the power of the devil... with his holy and precious blood & his innocent suffering and death. All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom ...just as he is risen from the dead & lives & rules eternally."

With words like "freedom," "Lord," "kingdom," and "rule," we have entered into another way of thinking, a third way of portraying what Christ has done for us in his death and resurrection. Such words have to do with power and authority, conflict and liberation.

So Jesus' words in John 8 have to do with the liberty Jesus has won for us at Golgotha. Jesus came to deliver us from the tyranny of darkness, sin, and death. He came to claim us as his rightful spoils of war in order to usher us into his kingdom. Under his Lordship, we are really free.

Jesus said, "All who practice sin are its slaves." To this verbal slap in the face his hearers reacted strongly: "We are the descendants of Abraham," they retorted. "We have never been enslaved to anyone." Their memory, I fear, was short. At that time their country was only a small holding of the Roman Empire ruled by Caesar. Beginning with Moses, they had become progressively enslaved during the years of their sojourn in Egypt. It appears that even Abraham's children had been slaves on and off for centuries. The reality of their spiritual enslavement was even more binding. The sons of Abraham are also the sons of Adam. And when Adam sinned he opened a Pandora's Box of death and darkness, of sin and enslavement - and the lid is still ajar.

Paul also wrote about it: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.... Death ruled (as king) from Adam to Moses."

Sin's power enslaves: It robs us of life in its fullness. It deludes us into thinking we are free and happy in the midst of death. Here's the real mystery of sin: We not only perceive living under sin's power as normal, we gladly swear allegiance and heartfelt loyalty to this tyrant. So Jesus is speaking to us, too, when he says, "All who practice sin are its slaves." Apart from Christ, we find our situation as death, that is, "without God and without hope in the world."(Ephesians 2:12)

Now, lest we despair, we need to look at the other side of the coin. Jesus not only said that "all who sin are its slaves." He also said, "If the Son makes you free, you will be really free."

The Good News is that "God so loved the world" - that's you and me - "that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send the Son into the world, but in order that the world might be

saved through him." Jesus came to provide a way out of slavery to liberty, to "pass over," as he put it, "from death to life." In Jesus, God provided for us all a new Exodus, a way to enter the promised liberty his death and resurrection have won for us.

And only Jesus could have done this. Only he has the authority, and the right to do it. He said, "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does. If the Son sets you free, you will be really free."

Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord and co-creator of all things. As the Son, he has all the authority of the Father. We read in John, "He who God has sent, namely, Jesus, utters the words of God; ... the Father loves the Son, and has put all things into his hands." All

things. His Lordship extends over sin itself. "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." John 3:34-35.

Jesus is God's Son - and only his authority makes us free.

But as history has demonstrated, the price for freedom - whether for black slaves or for concentration camp slaves - is not cheap. Over a million Americans died in the Civil War. Tens of millions died during World War II in Europe alone to set the world free of Nazi Fascism. Bonhoeffer had much to say in his book "The Cost of Discipleship."

The price for our freedom from sin was not cheap either. The price was nothing less than Jesus' holy and precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death. So it is with Jesus. He did not pay a ransom to sin, death, the devil, the Law, or any other "principality or power." He did what was necessary to set us free. It was enough. His suffering and death got the job done.

Receive the already accomplished work of liberation won for you on Golgotha. By being disciples of Jesus, the Son of God, you are given the right to become a child of God. And your inheritance and birthright in Christ is life, life in its fullness, and liberty from sin's power. The reforming church was born out of a struggle for justice within the church & a commitment, not only to the past, but also to the future of the Church for the sake of life in the Good News of Jesus for all bound by sin & broken by shame, for the sake of freedom. Indeed! Jesus said, "If the Son makes you free, you will be really free."

