

The Truth That Sets You Free

REFORMATION DAY

October 29, 2017

JOHN 8:31-36

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Free from sin, from death, from fear. Free from the sin of our own flesh, from the temptation and shame of our world, from the devil and his temptations and the fear of the demons. Free from everything standing against life, everything doing violence to a person, everything hindering us from the joy of living in the gifts of the God of life, free from everything bringing us into fear.

As you abide in my Word, says Jesus, ***you are my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***

[John 8:32]

Jesus sets us free. How? By revealing the truth to us. *You will know the truth, says Jesus, and the truth will set you free.*

Later, standing in front of Pontius Pilate, while Pilate was trying to figure out whether or not he should have Jesus crucified, Jesus said to Pilate, ***“I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”*** To which Pilate said, ***“What is truth?”*** [John 18:38]

We can join Pilate in his question. *What is truth*, especially if this truth sets you free?

Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had spoken to the scribes and Pharisees to tell them what the problem was. John 8:15:

[Jesus said,] “You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one.”

Now we can look at the truth that sets us free. The scribes and Pharisees judge according to the flesh. Of course they do. So do we. What else do you judge by?

You see a man hit his neighbor, you judge by what you have seen in the flesh, and you rightly say, that man is guilty of violence. That’s just reality. You see a child disobey parents, and you rightly say, that child is being disobedient. That’s just reality.

Can we not hear of a major power player in Hollywood and Washington molesting women and rightly say, *If those charges are true, then he is guilty of rape?* Isn’t that just reality?

Our own lives—when we fail to speak kindly of neighbor, when we fail to place our spouse before us, when we refuse to show honor to those given authority, are we not guilty in the flesh of breaking God’s Law that we should love our neighbor? This is nothing more than stating reality.

There is reality in what we see in the flesh. But Jesus speaks of a different reality. When Jesus says,

“the truth will set you free,”

and when he says,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me,”

[John 14:6]

the word Jesus uses for truth is the Greek word *Aletheia*. But the Greek word *Aletheia* doesn’t mean truth just in the sense of truth versus lie. It’s not reduced to saying that if I actually have an orange in my hand but I tell you it’s an apple, that’s not the truth, but a lie. *Aletheia* includes that, to be sure.

But it is bigger than that. *Aletheia* means not simply truth, but reality. It’s what is. It’s calling a thing what it really is. So the reason that holding an orange but telling you it’s an apple is not the truth is

because it's not reality. In reality, it's an orange. To call it anything else is denying reality, it's a lie.

So when Jesus tells us, **you will know the truth and the truth will set you free**, he is proclaiming, *There is a truth, a reality, you need to know. It's not the reality you know by sight, by flesh. That's the same reality the scribes and Pharisees know. That is the reality that can be measured and judged by the Law. It is the reality of life lived under the Law—the reality of sin in this world, of sin in your life, of temptation by the demons, of fear of death and judgment; it is the reality of everything that stands against life, everything doing violence to people, everything hindering from the joy of living in the gifts of the God of life.*

But there is another reality, and it sets you free. I am that reality, says, Jesus. I am your reality. I am your forgiver and Savior, your deliverance from sin, death, and the devil, I am your resurrection and life, I am the reality you have not by sight, but by faith; not by what you know in the flesh, but by what you are given in my Word.

So, we live with two realities at the same time, simultaneously. One is the reality we live in in our life of flesh, the reality we see every day, the reality measured and judged by the Law.

The other is the reality we live in our life of faith, the reality daily delivered to us by the Word of Gospel, the reality we see by looking at the death of Jesus on the cross on our behalf, the reality for us which can never be placed under the measurements and judgment of the Law, but which receives abundantly and without measure the gifts of Jesus.

The one is the reality which brings slavery to the Law and death. The other is the reality which sets you free and bestows life.

On this day, the Church celebrates the Reformation. If the Reformation is about anything, it is about the conscience—the conscience of the sinner, your conscience and mine.

The Reformation is not a political movement. It was not a revolution in academia. It was not an effort to overthrow the Pope. It was not a rejection of some manmade church structure or hierarchy.

The Reformation is about the conscience. It is about freeing the conscience from guilt. It is about speaking the cleansing, forgiving word of Jesus to free the conscience from shame and to stand the sinner before God justified.

We teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they have faith that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By his death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in his sight.

That's Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession. It's called the Article of Justification. It is accepted and taught by the Lutherans, it is rejected by the Pope. It's what the Reformation is about. The Lutherans know this, the Pope knows this—and it is the article the Pope condemns.

But the article of justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls. The justification of the sinner before God—that the sinner is justified not by his own strength, merits, or works, but is justified freely for Christ's sake through faith—this is the cleansing of the conscience. This word—this word spoken by Christ that your sin is forgiven, forgiven completely, fully, and only by grace—this word is truth, it is your reality, it gives you your reality in Christ, so that you are free.

Free from sin, from death, from fear. Free from the sin of our own flesh, from the temptation and shame of our world, from the devil and his temptations and the fear of the demons. Free from everything standing against life, everything doing violence, everything hindering us from the joy of living in the gifts of the God of life, free from everything bringing us into fear.

By faith in the Word of Jesus you are justified. That is the reality you were baptized into, your reality in Christ. *If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.*

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.