

Sermon Draft

Text: John 8:31–36

Sermon: Reformation Day 2016 (Truth and Freedom)

Happy Reformation Celebration!

Truth and freedom—both are precious to each one of us. We want others to tell us true statements, not lies. We want what we hear on the radio, see on TV, or read in newspapers to be true. We talk about truth in advertising. When it comes to politics and governmental action, we wish that politicians and officials would speak truthfully.

We study historical events so that we can know the truth about what happened. As Americans, we treasure our liberties and freedom, the freedom to worship without persecution from the government, the freedom to vote for the candidate of our choice, the freedom to travel when we want, and so forth.

We value our freedom especially when we think of the lot of those living in countries with oppressive governments. Yes, truth and freedom are both precious. People have fought and died for the sake of one or the other, and sometimes for both together.

Our text for this Reformation service deals with truth and freedom. The word "truth" in our passage from the Gospel of John does not signify simply the ordinary meaning of the word or a philosophical concept. Jesus talks about *the* truth—the ultimate truth, the highest truth, the truth that is of greatest importance for every human being. The Reformation led by Martin Luther was concerned with this truth. In our text, Jesus says that the truth sets free.

Tied in with "*the truth*" are the matters of spiritual freedom and slavery, of everlasting life and everlasting death. From our text, we see that the truth that sets free is needed by all, and that this truth is the Word of Christ.

Every person needs *the truth* that sets free. This truth shows us reality spiritual reality: that there is a God, who this God is, that there is a heaven and a hell; it tells about man by nature being spiritually lost, about the way to everlasting life.

Today in this country, we encounter not a few but several religious and philosophical systems. In polls of Americans, most respondents said all religions are valid. We are asked to be broad-minded, to be good sports and confess, as so many do, that "it really doesn't matter what a person believes as long as he or she is sincere in that belief," or, "there are different roads to heaven."

But this is not the truth! People holding to these religious or philosophical systems are believing falsehood.

Our text has as its background Jesus speaking to a crowd of Jews. Many of the Jews in that crowd were led to believe *the* truth. There were those who did not believe *the* truth, however; they rejected this truth that sets free, because they felt they already knew all that mattered. They thought they already were free, heirs of salvation, because they were physical descendants of Abraham. As God's chosen people, they felt they had never been in spiritual bondage to anyone or anything. They were not slaves of idols like the Gentiles were; they lived outwardly good lives and were free, so they thought, from the corruption that marked the public lives of those Gentiles.

But they were fooling themselves; simply the fact that they were Abraham's physical seed would not save them. John the Baptist once warned the Pharisees and Sadducees, who prided themselves in being Abraham's descendants, ***"Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham"*** (Mt 3:9). Furthermore, the unbelieving Jews were not as good as they thought they were.

Martin Luther, in the early part of his life, was living under a false concept of reality; he did not have the truth that sets free. As a monk in the Roman Catholic Church, he was taught, and he believed, that a person could earn God's favor and salvation by performing good works. Thus, Luther felt that his salvation depended on what he did, that he had to win his salvation, that everything depended on his efforts.

But this is not the way a person is saved. Luther was operating under a false concept of God and salvation.

These examples show that the truth that sets free is needed by all, for those who do not have this truth have what is not true.

They are controlled by, they are slaves of, falsehood, of unreality.

At the bottom of this belief in falsehood, and of falsehood itself, is the fact that all people are sinful. Falsehood and belief in falsehood are simply manifestations of people's sinful nature. The Bible says, "***Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins***" (Eccl 7:20). No one is without sin. This included the unbelieving Jews in Jesus' day; this included Martin Luther; this includes you and me.

The truth that is so desperately needed, this truth that sets free, is the Word of Christ. Broadly speaking, all of Scripture is the Word of Christ.

This Word reveals the true God, the triune God; it reveals spiritual reality. It includes both Law and Gospel. The Law shows people their sin and their need for the Savior. But particularly with our text, we are concerned with the Gospel—the Word of Christ, which is the liberating truth. This truth the Son of God revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament. This truth he spoke during his earthly ministry. This truth he continued to speak through his apostles and still speaks to us today through the writings of his prophets and apostles.

This Word of Christ, his teaching, is about Christ. The truth, the spiritual reality, is that God the Father sent his Son to be the Substitute for every human being. The Son of God became a man. This God-man, Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life for each of us. He also took all our sins upon himself and made total payment for these sins by his suffering and death on a cross.

But God raised him from the dead, thereby indicating that he fully accepted Christ's sacrifice for us. Jesus Christ has redeemed the whole world; he has made full atonement for all people's sins.

Through faith in Jesus, which God works and preserves in us *through the Gospel*, we have forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. We do absolutely nothing for our salvation; it is totally a gift of God. The Bible says, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"***

(Ephesians 2:8–9).

Through his Gospel Word, then, through "the truth," the Son of God sets people free. This is why it can also be said that the truth sets free. The Gospel truth reveals Jesus and his work of salvation; through the Gospel, he comes to a person and makes that person a believer in him, Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

When a person believes in Christ, he is freed from being a slave to spiritual falsehood, freed from believing in unreality. As believers, we do not live life under a delusion, but we have a true understanding of God and salvation.

Through faith in Christ, we are freed from being slaves to sin.

We are freed from the *guilt* of sin.

Through faith in Christ, we have received the righteousness

Christ has acquired for everyone with his perfect life and innocent suffering and death, and so are declared righteous, or are

justified, by God. The apostle Paul writes in Romans, ***“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law”***

(3:28).

Through faith in Christ, we are freed from the *power* of sin. Paul also writes in Romans, ***“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you”*** (Rom 6:11–14).

Finally, Jesus told those Jews who believed in him, and he tells you and me today, ***“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (vs. 31–32).

We are to abide in Christ's Word, the truth; we are to keep on reading the Word, hearing it, studying it, and partaking of the Word visualized, the Lord's Supper. This is a mark of truly being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus wants us who are free to remain in his Word, in the truth, so that we will continue to know and believe the truth, so that the truth will continue to keep us free.

So let us abide in the truth by continuing our own private devotions, our family devotions, by being in a Bible class, by attending congregational worship services. Through regular, meaningful contact with the truth, we are spiritually strengthened.

By remaining in Christ's Word, we will be ever ready to share, in humility and love, the truth with others, believers and unbelievers alike. May this be our goal to share the truth with someone who is an unbeliever, as God provides the opportunity.

Today, on this Reformation observance, we rejoice that, by God's grace, Martin Luther recovered "the truth"—Christ's Word, the Gospel. All who do not know and believe the truth are slaves—of falsehood and their own sin. Tragically, they are headed for everlasting damnation. But we and all others who have faith in Christ are free indeed! For this, we thank our gracious, loving God! May we abide in the truth, Christ's Word, and may we share his Word, the truth, with others—for *the* truth sets free!

Amen