

October 25, 2020 Sermon
Reformation Sunday
John 8:31-36

Then Jesus 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."

It's hard to know what the truth is these days, isn't it? I am a big proponent of checking facts before stating something that may not be true. But the truth is (no pun intended) that it's hard to find the truth.

I go to my favorite fact checking sites on the internet (yes, I use more than one) and sometimes I can get a handle on the truth and sometimes no matter what I read, the statement that was written to be truth is filled only with half-truths and hearsay, so it's difficult in these times to *know* the truth.

And I will admit, that, for a very long time, when I read, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free," it *spoke* to me about *not* lying, which probably isn't all that wrong. It's *not* good to lie. Telling the truth *always* makes a person feel better, especially if the lie had to grow and grow in order to *make* it the truth in one's *mind*.

And if we're going to tie telling the truth to the word "Reformation" then there is a constant reforming of the lie in order to make it believable. Thank goodness that's not what I'm going to talk about today.

The truth that sets us free is the truth we find in God through Jesus Christ. We are, this very day, celebrating the Reformation of the church. That day when Martin Luther had had enough of the whole paying indulgences in order to get into heaven thing, along with 94 other grievances. But reforming is always a part of being a Christian, isn't it? Even if you're not a Lutheran, life in the church changes.

And if you don't believe that, take a look at the people sitting in these pews, today. We have *definitely* reformed in the way we worship since last year. We now come in the door, and are welcomed with hand sanitizer and a thermometer at the ready. We don't shake hands any more.

We sit far apart from our friends. Singing is forbidden and communion is accomplished in the most sterile way possible. We even have a new musician, which has nothing to do with the virus, but it's part of a reforming that we are doing.

And the *truth* is, or *should* be anyway, that we have reformed in such a way that we can still come in the doors to hear the word of the one who says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We are here to renew and refresh our nearness, to "continue in my word," says Jesus, and to remember that in doing so, we are *truly* disciples.

I have in my personal library, a six-volume set of books called "The Annotated Luther." The first is called "The Roots of Reform," which was edited by Timothy J. Wengert. I thought maybe we would like to hear a bit of what Luther has to say, this morning.

Luther, in my opinion, likes to do things in a backward manner, like I'm sure he always started a novel from the back and worked his way to the front to better understand, so I will be jumping around a bit in what I have for you, this morning. I'm going to call it "Luther says."

Luther says: The word of God is necessary for the soul. "Moreover," says Luther, so that we may exclude everything—even contemplation, meditation, and whatever else can be done by the soul's efforts—all of this has no benefit. One thing and one thing alone is necessary for the Christian life, righteousness, and freedom, and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ.

As John states in chapter 11, verse 25, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in me will never die." And in John 8, verse 36, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Finally, in Matthew 4, verse 4, "One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Therefore, we may consider it certain and firmly established, that the soul can lack everything except the word of God. Without *it* absolutely nothing else satisfies the soul. But when the soul has the word, it is rich and needs nothing else, because the word of God is the word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, freedom, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and every imaginable blessing.”

Luther asks and answers the question: What Must be Believed. Therefore, when you begin to believe, you discover at the same time that everything in you is completely blameworthy, damnable sins, as Romans chapter 3, verse 3 states: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And in Romans 3, verses 10-12, it says, “There is no one who is righteous,” no one does good, “all have turned aside, altogether they have done worthless things.”

By this knowledge you will realize that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you, in order that, believing in him, you may become another human being by this faith, because all your sins are forgiven, and you are justified by another’s merits, namely, by Christ’s alone.

Luther says: A Human Being is Justified by No External Work

Because this faith can only rule the inner person (Romans 10:10 says “one believes with the heart and so is justified), and because this faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inner person cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any external work or activity at all and that no works whatever have anything to do with the inner person.

In the same way, on the other hand, the inner person becomes guilty and a condemned slave of sin only by ungodliness and unbelief of the heart and not by any external sin or work. It follows that the primary concern of each and every Christian ought to be that, by putting aside the supposition about works, they strengthen faith alone more and more and through that faith “grow in knowledge” not of works but “of Christ Jesus,” who suffered and rose again for them, as Peter teaches us in 2 Peter 3, Verse 18.

For no other work makes a Christian. Thus, when the Jews in John 6:28 asked what they should do to perform the works of God, Christ dismissed their multitude of works, which he realized puffed them up, and prescribed one work for them, saying, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent," for "it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

So, hopefully, today, we have learned through Luther that following Jesus is the truth that sets you free. We don't have to run and find God in Christ, because he's been with us all along. We need only to acknowledge that fact and follow in his ways and we are set free.

Jesus knows that we can be overwhelmed with what is happening in the world, today and that our faith can become weakened when we get too involved in the worldly things and less in the Godly things. It's easy to forget that we are baptized children of God and that we are called to follow.

Jesus reminds us through his word that discipleship isn't about membership in a congregation or even a denomination, but it is about living and continuing to live through God's word. We can memorize and regurgitate all the scripture we want, but if we are not living in the word of God, then we are not living in the truth.

God places no conditions on us at all in order to love us. We are his...free and clear, and we can give thanks that our salvation was chosen *for* us and *not by* us. As we go out this week, let's remember that *we* belong to *God* and things will change, and reform, and as long as our truth lies in the word of God in Christ, we will *always* be set free. Amen.