

Reformation Sunday/October 25, 2015  
John 8:31-36/Freedom through Truth  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

In our gospel reading for this Reformation Sunday, Jesus teaches truth is the means to freedom. Truth is a very important part of Jesus' teaching. He called Himself the truth when He said, [John 14:6] “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, He called Him the Spirit of Truth. Jesus promised, [John 15:26] “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

Ignorance of the truth is not just dangerous for our earthly lives, but ignorance of spiritual truth is even more dangerous for our eternal lives. Have you heard someone say, “Your truth is not my truth.” Truth by definition is the same for everyone; it is not malleable and does not change. It is what it is.

The difficulty for us is some truth is very difficult to find and even more difficult to understand. The truth of science is hard because the physical, measurable, observable universe is just that way, every discovery creates more questions than answers. The magnitude of discovery in just the observable realm of God's creation is staggering all by itself.

Then there is the spiritual realm of God's creation. Humanity doesn't even have devices for measuring, detecting, or analyzing spiritual truth. All we can do is think about spiritual truth and hope philosophy can give us some answers. Because we don't have the

resources needed to discover spiritual truth, we cannot discover anything about spiritual truth on our own.

That is the reason today's Gospel is so important. Jesus Himself tells us the things we need to know about spiritual truth are contained in His Word. Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Jesus went on to explain our own sin enslaves us. Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." According to Jesus, the most important spiritual truth is truth frees us from our sin. But how do we know Jesus has the authority to speak in this area?

In order for us to know eternal truth, we need an authority who knows the truth that lies beyond the grave. We need an authority who is able to die and then rise from the dead. The only authority who fits that description is Jesus Christ the person who is God incarnate.

The writer to the Hebrews expressed this very well when he introduced the letter with these words: [Heb 1:1-2] "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..." Jesus Himself tells us His words are the authority that provides eternal truth.

The earthly institutions of the church in sixteenth century Europe had forgotten this truth. The teachings of the church had slowly drifted away from God's word over the centuries until they bore little resemblance to God's truth. Instead of receiving the freedom of the truth that comes from the Word, the people lived in bondage of guilt.

Martin Luther did not know the truth of God's Word and so he did not know the freedom that comes from the Word. He even confessed at one time he hated God because he thought all God did was heap on guilt and threaten people with judgment and hell.

All that changed when Luther became a professor of the Bible at Wittenberg. As Luther taught about the Word of God, he came to know God's Word in all its grace. He began to see the things he learned from his teachers did not agree with God's Word. He began to learn about the freedom that comes from knowing God's Word.

As he learned the truth, he learned not only about the law that condemns, but he also learned about the Gospel that saves. God's word says, [2 Cor 5:21] "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The Gospel accounts are dedicated to the message of the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. With His suffering and death, Jesus took away our sins and carried them to the cross. The sign of His resurrection certifies our Lord's death was a total victory over sin, death, and the devil. God's Word doesn't just tell us about the law that condemns, but it also tells us Jesus took our condemnation on Himself. It tells us because of Jesus's work, we are free of the condemnation of sin. This is the truth that sets us free and the Good News of the Gospel.

Martin Luther began to understand God is not a horrible judge who is out to get us. Instead, God is a loving Father who sent His only Son to save us. Luther began to understand God's Word is not a book of rules designed to make us miserable. Instead it is a book of love designed to point us to Christ who takes away our sin.

Thankfully, Luther could not keep this good news to himself. He translated God's Word into the language of the people, so they too

could have the wonderful news about God's forgiveness and salvation. God worked through Luther to bring the freedom of God's truth to the world. We give thanks to God for Martin Luther and the German Reformation of the sixteenth century. We give thanks because they restored the truth of God to the world.

At the same time, we also know the Reformation is never over. As long as the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh continue to attack the truth, we will always need reforming. As our enemies attack us, we will continue to stray away from the freedoms of God's Word. Only a continuous reformation will bring us back into the freedom we have in God's truth.

The devil hates God's Word. He will tempt you in every way, with all kinds of excuses to stay away from it. He will tell you: Sunday morning is the only day you can sleep in; the Bible is too hard to understand; you already know all the Bible you need to know; you're too old to learn anything about the Bible; and so forth. All of these excuses are the work of the devil. He is trying to make you into his child by depriving you of the Word of God.

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Ultimately, the work of reformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who works through all the reformers to continuously proclaim the Word of God that makes us into disciples. The Word that reveals the truth of salvation that makes us free. By God's Word the Holy Spirit works faith in you; the faith that believes in Jesus Christ unto eternal life. The word of God is the means by which the Son sets you free. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Praise be to God!