

Reformation Sunday
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
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Grace and Peace to your all from our God our creator and sustainer - Amen.

This morning as we join in commemorating the anniversary of the Reformation, we also join in celebrating the way God has been at work in the lives of three pretty amazing young people from our community as they affirm their baptisms today.

Charlie, Lana, and Nic - what a joy it has been to witness you all learn and grow with God over the last three years. You have blessed our community through your honest reflections, your questions, and your energetic exploration of faith. If you haven't heard it said already - we are extremely proud of you all and we look forward to hearing more about your journey with God as you continue to grow in faith.

And as I say this, I can almost hear what our confirmands might be thinking...

Wait, what?

Continue to grow in faith?

"But I've already finished the classes, submitted and shared my faith story. I can say the Lord's Prayer even when the pastors try to mess us up. Did I forget to do that last worship note? What else could be left? Just tell me!"

These are similar questions to the ones Jesus encounters in our reading from John's Gospel today, as some of Christ's followers are confronted with the idea that they too are called to continue to learn and grow as disciples if they wish to be set free.

And their response is everything we might expect them to say.

"Free? Jesus we have never been anything but free! What are you even talking about? Tell us what we must be missing here because we have been following you across this region to hear your teachings - how aren't we free?"

While we might expect Jesus to fire back by asking his followers how they have so quickly forgotten their ancestors were enslaved under Egyptians for centuries, or how they could have over looked the way the Roman empire had come to overbearingly rule their communities - Jesus doesn't.

Instead he gets to the heart of the matter when he responds - "You are a slave to your sins, which is why you need to be continually set free by God."

Talk about a mic drop.

And it's a moment that likely left his followers feeling a little more exposed than they would have liked.

Yet, it may have been the very moment they needed to open up about how God is at work in their life.

So, this morning as we lift up the freedom we have found through the waters of baptism and our life as people of the reformation – we ourselves are presented with a similar question as well - how do we continue to be set free as people of faith today?

And if you, like Jesus' disciples, are wondering if you need to be set free - just ask yourself when was the last time you felt like you were enough? A time you didn't feel the overwhelming need to get ahead at work or school, or a time you didn't wish you were a better parent for your children, a better partner to your spouse, or a better friend to those you care about?

What about the last time you felt whole? A time when you didn't feel the hurt and sting of another's words, or a time you didn't regret the brokenness your actions brought on those you love?

What about the last time you truly felt loved? A time where you didn't have to watch your back, or worry about an attack on your weaknesses? A time when your own insecurities didn't get in the way of sharing your true feelings with those you cared most about?

The truth of the matter is, we all know far too well just how bound up we can become by this world – because truly being set free isn't as easy as it seems.

If you are anything like me – sometimes admitting our need to be set free is the largest hurdle to get over to begin with. I want to try to make it on my own. To prove that I am good enough or smart enough to keep from falling short. However, this is far from the truth we have come to know as God beloved children.

It's not our job to be perfect or even to try – because that is not freeing in the slightest!

However, we begin to be made free by being honest with ourselves and with God. And for us within our life of faith that honesty begins with admitting the ways in which we need help, forgiveness, and hope in our lives and our world. And for us within the church we have come to call this repentance.

We are not big on repentance these days, but some of that might be because of our confusion about what that really means for us as followers of Christ. When Martin Luther talked about repentance during the reformation he wasn't just talking about a formulaic confession. He was inviting us into a kind of truth telling that allows us to be honest about the ways we have been enticed by the world to try to be God in God's place.

The ways in which we have tried to make it on our own. To be strong enough, or whole enough, to feel like we are in control of our lives. But all this teaches us is that we will never be enough to secure anything outside of our own failing.

Yet, the truths that Christ and Luther call us to today are actually two very different sides of the same coin.

The first that Jesus lays out for us in our gospel lesson today is that we are sinners. Sinners that no manner of Facebook likes, good karmic deeds, offerings, or best intentions will ever redeem. It's a truth that hits us to our core – dragging us down until we realize we can't save ourselves, and that we need to let that go, and let God when it comes to the pain we have caused and experience in our lives and world.

The second truth we hear through the waters of baptism, at communion, and through the good news proclaimed by the scriptures, is that while we are sinners, we are at the same time called and cherished as God's beloved children. Sinners whose futures are not set out by our regrets or mistakes – but through Christ, we can trust in the truth that nothing, not even sin and death is beyond God's redeeming grace.

This truth does not tell us that we are perfect – in fact it tells us the exact opposite of that. But what it helps us realize through an honest look at our lives is that God's grace, love, and forgiveness is perfected and renewed in us each and every day when we are honest with God for our need to be renewed, reclaimed, and named as God's beloved.

So perhaps the best way to commemorate the Reformation and uplift our Confirmands Affirmation of Baptisms today is to remember and repeat the truth of both these revelations over and over and over until we know their truth within the depths of our being.

That we are simultaneously sinner and saints.

Unable to save ourselves, yet completely justified by the gift of God's grace.

That we are wholly redeemed, and wholly set free.

That nothing, not even our sin and death will ever be able to keep us from God's loving embrace in this life or into eternity. And that is the freedom we uphold for you today Charlie, Lana, and Nic - as you prepare not only to continue to grow in faith – but also as you affirm your Baptisms today.

That this confirmation of your faith journey is not something that will just happen today – but it is a truth God will remind you of for the rest of your lives. That God, the almighty three in one, will go with and before you wherever your life may take you. Setting you free to live as God's beloved. A truth that will not only change the way you come to see yourself, but the very world in which you live.

And so our prayer for you all today is that you would be set free by the truth of Christ's words today - that God's Love, forgiveness, and Grace will always be there for you to embrace. And may this be so among us. Amen.