

Sermon Transcript - Bishop Atahualpa Hernández
Synod Reformation Worship Service 10/30/2022

John 8:31-39 (Translated from Spanish NVI)

Jesus turned to the Jews that believed in him and said: If you remain faithful to my teachings, you will be my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. They answered him, we are the descendants of Abraham and we have never been slaves to anyone. Jesus answered, truly I can assure you, all those who sin are slaves to sin. Now, the slave does not remain in the family forever, but the Son remains in it forever. So, if the Son liberates you, you will be truly freed. This is the word of God.

May the grace and love of our loving Lord Jesus Christ continue to be with you today and always.

We are very grateful to our God for allowing us to celebrate 505 years of constant reform of His church this morning. We congregate because of he who inspired men and woman, in the 16th century to valiantly proclaim the good news of salvation. We remember what happened five centuries ago, but we also look forward. The same God of those times continues to work in the church today. Through his sons and daughters he continues to proclaim his gratuitous forgiveness, He continues to transform our world from evil and injustice to service based on love. God continues to free us by His grace for His glory.

It seems to me very interesting that the passage that we have just read in the Gospel mentions that Jesus directs His words towards the Jews that had believed in Him. I ask myself, who are those Jews that believe in Him in the gospel of John? The initial context says to us that Jesus had been teaching in the temple. John the evangelist had accumulated a great number of controversies throughout the preceding chapters, and in growing form, in the narration, the crisis that the teachings of Christ had generated had been honed. They polarized the opinions of those that heard them. Some thought they were miracles, or asked about the messages, and they believed in Him. Nevertheless, many doubt and wonder if this is actually who they were waiting for.

The question can be expanded a little bit more - Who were the Jews that believed in Christ throughout the gospel? We find that the first disciples - Andres, Simon, Paul, Philip, Nathanael, disciples of John the Baptist, believe in Christ. Many Jews believed in Christ because of the signs that He gave. *Nicodemos* believes in Christ. The Samaritan women and many Samaritans that live in the town believe in Christ. The Royal official whose son was sick, and his entire family also believe in Christ. When the disciples see the bread and fish being multiplied, some of them are taken aback, and there is a controversy about who believes in Him and who doesn't. Many in the crowd believe in him during the festival of the Jews, and ask themselves- when the Christ comes will he give more signs than these?

The brothers of Christ don't believe in Him, the crowds refuse Him. Some Jews can't believe that he is the 'bread' descended from heaven. Those from their His own region - the Pharisees, the governors, the principals, don't believe in Him either. Meanwhile here at the beginning of the passage it says that there are some Jews that believe in Him.

This accumulation of elements makes me think about how diverse our communities can be. Those of us that have believed in Jesus Christ are in a community, in a congregation that have come together, perhaps from different regions, from different backgrounds or contexts. Today that we celebrate the reformation, in many different places men and women come together that believe in Jesus Christ. In Canada, in Colombia, in many different parts of the world, exist men and women that have believed in Christ. That good news that has been proclaimed unites us. The gospel that we have heard unites us in Jesus Christ.

So, in that diversity, in that abundance of people that have believed in Christ, I ask myself- What is the message then for church today? For our church, that inherits five centuries, more than five centuries, five centuries and five years of that movement, that was proclaimed, that was announced in that liberating, healing message.

Allow me to consider that there are two elements that we can see as the message for us. Firstly, a message to those that are hearing this good news for the first time. A message that if we remain in His word, we would become truly His disciples. That we would know the truth and that the truth would set us free. The wonderful message, the good news that is proclaimed to us in

the gospel, is that in the word of Christ, in His promise, in His liberating message, we are truly free.

The message rediscovered by Martin Luther and by other men and women 5 centuries ago, was that it is not what we do in front of God, but rather that He has given us his mercy. That it is not by our efforts or our accomplishments in front of God, but rather because of His grace that we are truly liberated. The wonderful message that is announced to us is the forgiveness that we have in Jesus Christ, it is the freedom to serve others. It is the love that is reconciled by our Father that allows us to love our equals. It is the true freedom that allows us to serve those that are around us, but also to be responsible with the creation, with this world that God has created.

The message that truly frees us was announced by Christ Jesus. He, in his incarnation, in his presence among us, living among us, liberated us so that we could love, serve and take care of the creation. But perhaps the message is also for those, like the first Jews. We respond, pointing out that we are not slaves, denying the reality of sin, denying the reality of our condition as human beings. A message that we could say for those of us that are walking on the path, not for those that are listening to us for the first time, but rather for those of us that have been in the churches, in the communities, perhaps for much time, and we are familiar with all of the stories of the bible, and we know the history of the reformation, and year after year we come to a church like this one to celebrate the reformation.

What can it say then to us? Firstly, we should consider the triple response of the Jews to Jesus. They say - we are descendants of Abraham, we have never been slaves of anyone, how is it then that you can say that can be truly free? This response of the Jews invites me to ask myself if we also assume attitudes that are similar. Perhaps we say that we are already Christians, from what do we need to free ourselves? Our faith is already strong.

I think, five centuries after the reformation, we need to ask ourselves if we, like the Jews, haven't accumulated excuses in order that we feel comfortable. If we haven't made our temples secure where others cannot enter? If we haven't felt comfortable with the people that are already like us, that know how we speak to each other, how we greet each other, how we say goodbye to each other? But in that security we have forgotten those that are

outside, those that need to know that love. I ask myself if like the Jews we make excuses to dissimulate the reality of who we are.

Christ Jesus is who can liberate us, who can break those chains, who can knock down those walls that we have built. He is that bridge that made it possible for us to come to God . He is that wonderful God that came to live among us, bringing down that wall that divided us and bringing us closer to God. He is the One that today allows His church to continue on that same path and transforms our closed worlds, our worlds that are built with barriers, so that we can serve those that are needing us. The emphatic use by Christ saying- Truly, truly I say to you that if the Son liberates you, you are truly free.

That is the word that resonates in our churches five centuries after the reformation. If Christ Jesus frees us we will be truly liberated. Liberated as a church to break the barriers, liberated as a church to proclaim that love and salvation to those that have not heard it.

Liberated to serve, to give each other, in response, the love that God has given us - to our neighbour. Liberated to continue to construct relationships of love, in brotherhoods, in Companion Synods, in the churches that all throughout the world proclaim with faith the word of God.

God grant that, as we come together this morning to celebrate what Christ Jesus has done amongst us, the freedom that He has given us, we can reflect and we can be transformed by His love, to be a church that values and treasures the inheritance that we have received for more than five centuries. But one that also moves forward, that also projects itself recognizing that we need to continue to proclaim that message of liberation and salvation in Christ Jesus.

Amen