

Prayer of the Day:

Gracious Lord, our refuge and strength, pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your Word, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all their enemies, and bestow on the Church your saving peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. If you continue in my Word, you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Alleluia. (John 8:31,32 cf. RSV)

Sermon Text:

On October 31, 1517 an Augustinian monk, who had been promoted to the position of Doctor of Theology five years earlier, made his way to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. A few blows of a hammer posted his 95 statements, theses for debate on the bulletin board of his day. Repentance, Indulgences, and the Power of the Pope were all on his mind. He intended debate, discussion on these topics that he or the church might see the error of their ways. It would come to symbolize the start of the Lutheran Reformation, changing the landscape of the church visible and even the world it occupies ever after.

In truth, it all started much earlier than that. His days in the monastery had proven two things of Martin Luther. The first was that he was an intelligent individual who took the Word of God very seriously. The second was that his conscience was plagued by his own sin. The result was a young monk conscience stricken with the knowledge that the righteousness of God demanded absolute perfection, righteousness like His own from His people, a righteousness Luther could never provide.

Under the Augustinian system of thought, Martin would torture himself, beating himself and forcing himself to sleep on the cold stone floors of the monastery for nights on end. He would wear out confessors confessing every sin he could possibly think of no matter how small or trivial. In his estimation, no matter how much he did, he still failed to live up to the perfect demands of God. He was right. Paul told the Romans in our second lesson, *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin* (Romans 3:20). Jesus puts it even more bluntly in our Gospel lesson, *I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

To such a man struggling so mightily with his own sinfulness, the idea of indulgences, that someone could pay their way into heaven even without repentance as some of the sellers were proclaiming, well it was too much a gross abuse of the power which had been given the sellers of indulgences for sure and if Rome were behind it, an abuse of the power of the church in general.

Text: John 8:31-36

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. – NIV84

Unfortunately, it wouldn't be until a year or two later that Martin Luther would begin to truly understand how far things had gone.

By most accounts it was sometime in 1519, as he struggled with that concept of the righteousness of God above that God opened his eyes to His truth, finally setting him free. Of course, the teaching was nothing new but as old as Genesis' first Gospel promise. Even Paul after pointing out the inescapable nature of our sin as we stand before the Law of God goes on to tell us, *21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood* (Romans 3:21-25).

Do you see what Luther saw? It is not work, nor money, in fact it is not my righteousness as reckoned by the Law at all which sets me as holy or righteous before God. The righteousness God demands, God supplies, through faith in Jesus Christ. It is His perfection, His sacrifice on the cross, His resurrection to life which promise us everything and this is freely given, by grace to you and to me. In fact, as that second lesson concludes Paul writes, *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.* This dear friends is the truth and teaching of which Jesus speaks in our lesson today and it's the real reason for the Lutheran Reformation.

You know, it seems that the question comes up every time we celebrate the Reformation. Is any of this stuff still relevant today? I guess to me, such a view, that the truths of Reformation could become outdated or meaningless to us sounds a bit like the Jews in our Gospel lesson. *"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"* They both miss the point. Jesus reminds them, *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

Dear friend, are you a sinner? We confessed as much at the beginning of our service today. I'm guessing whether you think it's little of big no one here would be so crass as to stand up and announce their perfection publicly today. In fact, there are probably sins that cling to you whether in your heart or mind or to you flesh and in your actions and though you struggle against them, they always seem to come back around again. It's like your addicted to it, a slave to your sin whether it's covetousness or cocaine. Jesus says in such a condition you will never have a place in the family, a place in heaven no matter how many nice things you try to do, how much money you throw at it or how many followers you have on social media.

Only one thing works. *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* His blood, His righteousness, His truth made your own through His gift of faith washes away sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe. It makes you a son, a member of the family, an heir of heaven for all eternity.

³¹ *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* Jesus seems to think that His gospel is always relevant. His people do to. It's why God's people throughout the ages have been willing to endure one assault after another. It's why God's voice has resounded in Law and in Gospel since the fall in the garden. It's why a Medieval monk was willing to stand his ground against the powers of his day. The Truth sets us free. The Gospel is the most important message we will ever hear, preach or possess. It's why we celebrate Oct. 31 in worship every year and I dare say that the Gospel is the real reason for the Lutheran Reformation. Amen!