

“How Free Do You Want to Be?”
+ Reformation Sunday+ A +
Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 3:19-29, John 8:31-36
October 26, 2014

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this Reformation Sunday are the lessons for this day.

For many years I taught a class at Concordia that required the students to attend two church services at a Christian congregation and then interview the pastor. Some of them had never been in a Christian church before. I would go over with them beforehand an outline of what happens in most worship services: Confession and Forgiveness, Opening Prayer and calling on the name of the Triune God, Hymns, the sharing of the Word in readings and in a sermon, the offering and prayers, the highpoint of the service being the Lord’s Supper (though not all Christian churches celebrate it that way) and the final Benediction. I would give them ideas of things to look for in a church: banners, art, baptismal fonts and more than once I’d tell them to look to see if the pastor puts his watch on the pulpit when he starts to preach. Someone would always ask, “Is that important?” To which I can answer, “It means nothing.”

Well, today is a day when every Lutheran pastor in the world wants their sermon to mean something because we are celebrating the **Festival of the Reformation**. And while I could preach pages upon pages about our Lutheran history, and just what Luther did on that late October day in 1517 but that might take as long as one of Luther’s sermons: 2 hours! 2 hours while his congregation **stood** and listened (pregnant women and the aged were allowed a kind of 3 legged stool). That’s really not too bad, after all St. Paul preached about 8 hours until poor Eutychus fell asleep and fell out a window and died only to be brought back to life by Paul—that’s in Acts chapter 20 – oh don’t look so frightened, even I couldn’t talk that long?

As I looked over the three Scripture lessons for this morning, the same ones used every Reformation as far back as I can remember, it seemed to me that there was one idea, one question that ties all three together, a question as old as Jeremiah, and then Jesus and then St. Paul and as fresh and new as this very morning and for that matter, every morning of your life.

The question is: **“How Free Do You Want to Be?”** And I’m asking it of us all as children both of the Reformation and more importantly as children of God. **“How Free Do You Want to Be?”** Seems kind of obvious doesn’t it? As free as we can possibly be. But the Scripture lessons

have a better idea and that's what I want to go with while the veritable cell-phone clock is ticking away.

Go back to Jeremiah and the promise of a new covenant to replace the one that Israel had broken repeatedly, a different covenant that God would write, not on tablets of stone, but within their hearts. That's the first freedom: to be set free from the wreckage of the past and free to serve God in a new way, a way their God/our God who is near- not far away, would teach them. It was a freedom where through the prophets and now in these final days God has made actually possible for each of us and all of us together to know the unknowable God through God's incarnate, intimately knowable, ultimately crucified and risen Son, Jesus Christ. How free do you want to be? How about free enough to let go of the past and its burden of guilt and free enough to set others free by that same gift of forgiveness you first received with the gift of faith in Jesus – for many of us as tiny babes in baptism and anew every day thereafter.

St. Paul would have known a lot about that kind of freedom, for as he himself admitted, any man as guilty as he, “the chief of sinners” who had persecuted and killed those who first believed in Jesus as Lord - any man who had done those things could have, would have, maybe even should have been haunted an entire lifetime – a man who hunted, persecuted, tortured and killed others as a religious terrorist.

That's another freedom, you might want to ask yourselves about. How free do you want to be from God's righteous condemnation of you as a sinner – each of us as guilty in our own way as Paul. How free are you willing to be to refrain from condemning other Christians here in this family of believers at Jehovah or in other denominations – all sinners like yourselves, people whose struggles you don't even know or understand and whom God also freely forgives for Jesus sake.

How free do you want to be from the grudges against those who have hurt you? How free do you want to be to act, think, and speak with confidence knowing that everything you say or do, when you do it in the name of Jesus is either a forgiven sin when you mess up or a blessing that God is going to multiply.

How free do you want to be to continue in Jesus' word and let that freeing Word enrich and keep you as His disciples. The Bibles are no longer chained up in libraries as they were in Martin Luther's day. You can read your very own Bible like Justice and Alexander – join one of our Bible Studies here at Jehovah – do a daily study from online resources, the opportunities are limitless. There is true Reformation freedom found in immersing one's self in the Scriptures, reading them, studying them, sharing them because they tell the story of how Jesus broke the chains that bound us to sin and death and forged an unbreakable chain of faith that binds us in life and in death to Him, to be "free indeed." Free enough to tell God's Story and Our Story of the faith God has granted us.

"How free do you want to be in telling the Good News of Salvation to those who have not heard it or those who need to hear it again?" In this post-Christian era with people fanning the flames of fear about people of other religions, new Americans who have come here as immigrants just as all our ancestors did, but who believe in other gods – how free do you want to be to get to know them, to invest yourself in their lives – love them and share God's love with them.

Which leads to the last question before the clock runs out, "How free do you want to be to be loved and to love?" Well everybody wants to be loved, don't they? Don't be so sure of that. Love is a scary thing; not romantic love—some are scared of that too, others ought to be. But real love, the dying-on-the-cross-for-you-love, is the sincere promise that we can come to Jesus with all the garbage we've created by thoughtless, loveless acts and attitudes, and knowing that He already knows, we can lay them down and let Him love us, not because we are perfect or pretty good, but because we are His wounded sisters and brothers.

"How free do you want to be to love? Be careful there, too, because as Paul wrote, love bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things." You can read the rest for yourselves—its in First Corinthians 13. Just know that being loved by Jesus leads us to love all those whom Jesus loves, even when it cuts us to the quick. Well, then, I have watched the watch. Time's up for the pastor preaching it. Now it's your turn to go out and live it in the Freedom Christ earned for you and for me! Amen.

Now may our gracious Lord, who renews His people in every age, keep on renewing us in heart and mind and spirit, steadfast in His Word and bestow on His saving peace.

