

**“So 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.””**

Happy Reformation Day! On this day we celebrate freedom. Not necessarily freedom from the Roman Catholics, not necessarily freedom from rules and regulations, but freedom in Christ to be our true selves, free from sin, free from fear, and free from eternal death.

Today we learn TO KNOW GOD IS TO BE FREE. True freedom lies in true knowledge of God, and that is what we celebrate today, that the Reformation restored a proper understanding and relationship with the God of the Universe.

But, the first step is admitting you have a problem. I. The slave denies his chains (v. 33). To set our scene from our Gospel text from John 8, Jesus is talking to the Jews who had believed him. He tells the Jews how they can be true disciples, abide in the Word of God, and this will lead you to truth which will ultimately set you free.

The Jews give a puzzling response. **“They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”** Of course, this is a preposterous claim. To whom weren’t the Jews enslaved? Slavery in Egypt, slavery as foreign nations won military conquest, slavery as they worshipped false gods, slavery in Babylon, slavery to the Greeks, slavery to the Romans. Who didn’t the Jews serve?

The slave denies his chains. Oftentimes, many in our world have a higher view of themselves than they ought. We think freedom is simply the ability to whatever we wish. Yet in the land of the free, we as a society have been enslaved to our desires and others’ expectations.

Jean Jacques Rousseau born in the 1700s was a Swiss philosopher had been highly influential in the way we think and act as modern people. His philosophy can be summed up in the sentence, “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” In other words, I should be free to do whatever I want, society and its regulations—that’s the problem.

Many modern people applaud Rousseau as an example to follow. A man like Rousseau was truly free, free to come and go as he pleased, a renaissance man who had a variety of skills and traveled throughout Europe. Some might say Rousseau knew the truth, and the truth set him free.

The reality hardly matches up to the ideal. By most historians’ recounting, Rousseau was a horrible selfish man. He went from one romantic partner to the next. He fathered many illegitimate children and did not live up to his responsibility to be a husband or a father. He sent children to orphanages and left lovers to fend for themselves He never married. He pursued a life of pleasure. Yet

Jesus speaks the truth. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”** A man like Rousseau might have thought he was free, but *he* was the slave.

The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh are just like those Jews who denied that their people were ever enslaved. We do this when we use our freedom to follow our selfish desires. We tell ourselves, “I can stop whenever I want.” “If I’m not happy, I can leave.” “I deserve better than this!”

But there’s another extreme, II. The slave falsely seeks to work for his freedom. On this Reformation Day we would be remiss if we didn’t mention Martin Luther. Martin Luther wasn’t always Martin Luther. His birth name was Martin Luder.

Martin Luder was born to Hans and Margarethe Luder. Hans was a mine owner and a fairly influential person in his home town. Hans sought freedom for Martin by paying for a world-class education so Martin could go to law school. That was where true freedom lay, so thought Hans Luder, Martin’s dad, work your way to freedom by a lucrative career as a lawyer: freedom means ability to pay your bills and afford a little extra for comfortable living.

Yet Martin was still tormented by fears and anxieties. This presented itself as he was caught in a thunderstorm and made a deal with God that he would become a monk if God kept him alive.

Life as a monk hardly fixed things. He found himself deeper in despair and unsure of God’s love for him. Despite the hours of prayer, the time reading the Bible, the fasting, and the self-denial, Luther was still tormented with the thought that God was displeased with Him. This stemmed from Him not knowing the true God of the Bible. He thought he was a slave who had to work his way to freedom—a hired hand who had to earn a place in God’s kingdom.

And so we have two sides of slavery. Rousseau, who lived the life of freedom many modern people crave, yet lived it without God and unaware that he was enslaved to his sinful desires. On the other hand, we have Martin Luder, who lived as a slave to the rules of God, thinking he could earn his freedom through works. In both cases, neither man truly knew God—at least not how God has made Himself known to mankind.

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The thing that the Jews in this text and Martin Luder had in common was that God was right in front of their noses, and they didn’t quite recognize it.

We don't know exactly when this happened, many scholars debate when the light bulb turned on, but all we know is that the light bulb did turn on for Martin Luder. This might have coincided with his name change.

Luder wasn't a nice word in German. Around the time he posted the 95 theses to the chapel doors in Wittenberg, he changed his name to Luther, which comes from the Greek word meaning "free." In fact, we maybe we could say of verse 32, "**you will know the truth, and the truth will "Luther" you.**" Something freed Martin turning him from Luder to Luther. Maybe we should say, *someone*.

Martin Luther read the Bible and in reading a passage like this, found that the necessary change wasn't more effort, more fasting, more prayer. The change was one of the change of relationship. Jesus outlines this in our text, "**The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**"

Freedom lies not in living however you want like Rousseau or earning your master's favor like Martin Luder, but understanding that through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, you are no longer a slave, but sons and daughters of the king. It was this fact that changed Martin Luther and started what we now call the Reformation.

III. We know God through Jesus who gives true freedom. "**If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**" The man Martin Luther might be better called Martin Free-man because he was set free knowing he was adopted into God's family through Christ.

In this same vein, we could call the Lutheran Church the church of those who are free. Yet we find freedom not in living however we want, we are free to serve God, abiding in His Word, living in the truth, and enjoying the benefits of being in God's Family.

This is the revolution of the Reformation. No longer did you have to earn God's favor through indulgences, good works, & fasting. Knowing Christ through faith, you're already in. You're already forgiven. You're already made free.

Rousseau and people like him thought that freedom came through being whatever you wanted to be and doing whatever you want to do, but since we know God we know the truth and we know true freedom, this eternal Gospel of Christ Jesus teaches us instead that we are free to be who God has called us to be.

That means we can gladly serve in the places God has already placed us: as students, parents, spouses, as Christians, church members, and citizens, as those who have been made part of a bigger family than just our blood relatives, but made part of a heavenly family. True freedom lies in knowing that if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Amen!