

Reformation Weekend – John 8:31-39 & Rom. 3:19-28 – 10-29-11

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is a great day. Today we celebrate the fact that we are not Roman Catholic (just kidding!). What we do remember and celebrate today are two of the most important truths revealed in Scripture: (1) The total and utter depravity of humankind and (2) the total and utter and absolutely undeserved mercy God has shown and given to us in the life, death, and resurrection of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. These two truths, the complete sinfulness of you, me, of every person that has ever lived or ever will live, and what God has done to redeem a rebellious people, a people so rebellious that instead of wanting a God of mercy they'd rather have no God at all...this is what the Bible witnesses to again, and again, and again. This is something that Jesus witnesses to in our passage from John.

But there's something about this word "truth." Deep, deep down in the core of who we are we hate truth. We despise truth. We run away from what is true. We deny what is true. We are allergic and dead set against what is true. Instead of admitting what is true, we'd rather make up something that really isn't true. We are far more comfortable living with lies than we are with the truth. We can see that being echoed in our gospel reading.

Here we see Jesus talking to some Jews who had believed in him. Now notice that. These Jews believed in Jesus Christ. But even though they believed in him they lied right to his face. Jesus says to them, 'the truth will make you free.' And they respond, "We are descendants of Abraham

and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, ‘You will be made free’?” Anyone who knows their Bible can see how these believers in Jesus are lying right to his face. One of the most common things that God tells his people throughout the Old Testament is that, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, from bondage and slavery into the Promised Land.” And not only that but, the Israelites, the people who God revealed himself to over and over again, constantly found themselves in bondage, in slavery. Time and time again they worshipped false gods and idols. Time and time again they were in exile. First they were in Egypt in bondage to the pharaoh. Then they were in bondage to the Assyrians. After that they were in bondage to the Babylonians. After that they enjoyed a little bit of freedom under the Persians (but still ruled by them), then they were ruled by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and in Jesus’ day, they were ruled by the Romans. So for these Jews to say that they have never been slaves to anyone is anything but the truth. It was a lie they told in the very presence of the Lord who freed them time and time again. But Jesus sees right through their lie and he tells them of something that is far more powerful than any emperor; sin. Here is where Jesus tells them, and us too in case we miss the point, a truth we’d rather not hear: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”

Now, let’s use some logic to flesh this out. Do we sin? Yes. Does that mean we are included with that word “everyone.” Yes. Does that mean, then, that we are a slave to sin? Absolutely. Hold on a minute. Maybe we can turn to St. Paul to see if he says something else. Nope. He says the same thing. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Well, maybe we can look in the first book of the Bible maybe things were better back then. What does Scripture say about people before he sent the Great flood? Genesis says (6:5-6), “The LORD saw that the

wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind...it grieved him to his heart.” Ok, maybe not. Well what does God say after the flood, now that all the wicked people have been drowned? He says (8:21), “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth...” Ok, maybe not their either. Well, let’s look at the Psalms, those are prayers and hymns after all, maybe there’s something good about people said there. Wait, Psalm 51:5 says, “Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.”

So here we can hear from a number of places in the Bible besides from Jesus the same thing, something the Reformers knew all too well; that human beings, you, me, everyone that has ever lived or will ever be born share something in common – we are all sinners. But perhaps we don’t even need the Bible to tell us that. We can even look at our own self, all the poor decisions we have made, all the people we hurt, all the people we could have helped but didn’t, all the lies we’ve told to others or to ourselves, all the promises we made but never kept. Or we can look at how the sins of others affect us to the point where we don’t trust anyone, where we don’t worry about the needs of anyone else except our own, where we find it next to impossible to live into or even imagine a life of hope promised and prepared by God. If there was one of those terror alerts that we saw everywhere on TV after 9/11 ten years ago that measured the impact and reality of sin in our world, every hour, every day, would be the boldest red.

So all of that is the first truth the Reformers hammered home time and time again, and as Jesus says – this is supposed to make you free. To know that sin is too powerful a reality, to know that

there is sin out there, to say that there is sin deep within “here,” within me, that is freedom. Now, how is this supposed to make you free? How is that supposed to make us free? Well, as anyone who struggled with addiction knows, admitting that fact, that truth, is the first step to recovery. Forget the fact that everyone and their brother has told you that you’ve had a problem, you have to take ownership of that brokenness and despair yourself. And when you do that, you’re whole outlook on life begins to change and transform.

We must first always know how completely broken and sinful we truly are in God’s sight, we must first always know that we are as good as dead in God’s sight, before we can ever know how sweet the good news, how sweet the Gospel is for us, because God does something to dead people; He freely gives them new life. And that gets us to our second truth that Jesus hits on. Jesus says two things. First he says, “the truth will make you free” and later he says “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” And I’m putting those two verses together for a reason. In those passages Jesus is telling us how freedom comes – through him and because of him. The freedom God gives does not come through money, through fame, through hard work, through us feeling good about ourselves. The freedom God gives comes through a person, Jesus Christ, him and him alone and absolutely nothing or no one else. Now, what does this mean, that freedom only comes through Jesus Christ?

The freedom that comes through Jesus Christ, the total freedom from sin and death, is freedom that was worth dying for; it was freedom that God himself would die for, for you. God the Father, seeing how corrupt the world was and is, sent his Son to preach the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, he sent his Son to die for this corrupt world, for corrupt

people like you and me, he sent his Son to die on the cross and to be raised from the tomb. St. Paul tells us what this means in Romans 3 (:23-26), “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.” In this passage we see something that the Reformers of the church 500 years ago saw clearly – There is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves from sin and death. But God already has done something about that: Instead of wiping the earth clean like God did with the flood, God sends his Son, like a lamb to the slaughter, to take on the sin of the world, to be crucified, die, and be buried. And the only thing we need to do, and it really isn’t doing anything, is believe that what God did for us in Jesus Christ was “for me.” And simply by trusting in what God has done already, God considers us righteous, justified, made right with God, and so sets us free from whatever bondage we have gotten ourselves into. And so if you are not in bondage to sin, to death, to whatever separates you from God, then you are free because you belong to Jesus Christ and nothing else. He has made you his own. You are all his now. And that’s why you are free indeed, because Jesus Christ, God himself in flesh and bone, freed you by his death, his blood, his cross, his resurrection, and he did all that to forgive ungodly people like you and me. Brothers and sisters in Christ may this promise and this Man who is Truth always set you free. Amen.