

Reformation Sunday
November 3, 2019
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

John 8:31-36 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, “Very truly I tell you, 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.

“More Than Enough”

We control what we consume. We don’t want to let something in that could be bad for us. That’s true for the nutrition, but today I see a bigger emphasis on the information we absorb. We see ourselves as projects. We want to make sure we are doing the right things and enough of the right things. So we need to let the right things in. I read somewhere that a diet of chocolate and red wine is good for your heart. Doesn’t matter where I read it or who wrote it. That’s what I want to believe. I heard from a friend at school that our projects aren’t due for another week. Maybe that’s not what the assignment originally stated and the teacher hasn’t made a grand proclamation. But that’s what I’m going with so I don’t have to do homework all weekend long. I heard another round of budget cuts is coming down. But the company hasn’t said anything official yet, so I’m not sure if I should start exploring other work options yet or not. What’s fake news? What’s bad information? It makes a big difference.

We are careful about what we believe because we know it impacts our lives. How we perceive the information, the quality and the source of that information, determines what we will do with it. If we see it as truth, it will have an influence in how we live and act. And the knowledge we put to use in life will determine the results we get. Jesus wants to be at the beginning, middle and end of this formula for life. Jesus says: **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** (John 8:31,32) Sounds pretty simple. Take the message of Jesus to heart to know the truth and you will be free. With all of our evaluating and analyzing, Jesus wants to give us something more than information. More than just better facts to get more done in our day, Jesus gives himself. In Jesus we have more than enough.

One of the interesting things about this entire teaching moment with Jesus is that it takes place with believers. Jesus has been going back and forth with a rather hostile crowd of Jewish religious experts who have been throwing objections at Jesus and stumbling over his words. But through it all, as the tension rises with one faction of the crowd, Jesus is getting through to others: **“Even as he spoke, many believed in him.”** (John 8:30) And Jesus wants to bring these believers into a deeper relationship with him. So he addresses **“the Jews who had believed him.”** (John 8:31) Not people who had once believed in him but

stopped. People who get what Jesus is saying and accept who he says he is. But Jesus is still offering more than just enough. He wants them to be believers firmly entrenched in his Word without wavering. On the other side, it means people can trust in Jesus and yet miss out of some of the blessings he has in store for them through that relationship of trust.

Although slavery is now abolished by law in every country on the planet, some estimates place the number of people who are living in slave-like conditions anywhere from 21 to 46 million people around the globe. People don't intentionally volunteer to become slaves. They are taking risks that they hope will result in improved lives. They might pay thousands of dollars and travel thousands of miles under the promise that they will have work and housing and opportunities, but end up getting something very different. They are chasing a dream, but get trapped living a nightmare.

Jesus offers his hearers freedom because enslavement is very real and very dangerous. In the years before the Reformation, a powerful deception had seized many hearts. Medieval scholasticism had come up with the axiom: 'God does not deny grace to the man who does his best.' (McGrath, p. 60) It had been developed and refined over centuries. It was logical. The problem, however, is that it gave a false hope to people to just keep working harder to get on God's good side. It held out the hope that God will be there to do the rest after you have done everything you can do. Eventually it led to slavery for anyone who tried to live by it.

Our world today is much less medieval and much less dependent on what church authorities tell us to believe. Today, though, we live under the power of a more deadly lie. Secular standards have replaced musty old church books. Religiosity in every aspect of life has replaced the importance of religious truth inside churches. Work performance and health. Parenting and politics have all taken on outsized importance. And since they are all so monumentally important, you need to be excellent in all areas of life.

Some days you feel like you're doing a good job just keeping your children alive. But how do you know that's good enough? Are you sure you are feeding them what's best for them and giving them all the best experiences while not damaging their fragile egos? You know it is important to be a good citizen. But have you shown the proper amount of outrage at the despicable things the other side is doing? Have you let people know online what idiots they are if they really believe those terrible things? You work hard. But do you work hard enough? Have you done enough to stand out from the crowd? Have you improved yourself enough to make your organization better? You take care of yourself. When you struggle is it evidence you aren't doing enough? When you get sick is it a sign you aren't doing the right things or enough of them? There's a reason why so many of us feel so anxious and stressed out so much of the time. We feel the weight of everyone's expectations bearing down on us. You have to be sensitive and strong, intelligent and athletic, have a uniquely creative take on the world and yet not stick out too much. And if you do all the right things and make all the right choices, then you can expect, well, enough attention to get even more criticism.

Jesus comes to people like us who believe in him. And Jesus holds out the promise of deeper discipleship that handles the lies we swallow and deceptions we live by. But first Jesus has

to give us the truth. "You can't handle the truth!" is the explosive bombshell Colonel Jessup drops in the courtroom under examination during the 1992 movie "A Few Good Men." Jesus has truth for us that is just as difficult to digest. He says: **"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."** (John 8:34) We can avoid talk of religious morality. We can stay away from church. But all our efforts at trying to be good enough, to parade our enough-ness before the rest of the world only leaves us in worse shape. Unless we are perfect, we end up slaves. Unless we have done everything demanded by every voice out there, we find ourselves trapped. Any thought or word or action that doesn't conform to the standard of perfection puts us in shackles.

This helps explain what we really celebrate on Reformation. We aren't celebrating Martin Luther. That would mean elevating a very tortured man who for years of his life was consumed by the desire to be good enough. A man who put his body and soul through extreme stress all in an effort to find his enough-ness with God. No, we celebrate a key discovery by Martin Luther. Actually, the discovery of a key Bible truth that was there all along. It had just been covered over and obscured by what the key experts in society and theology had taught. Experts who told everyone what they needed to do to be good enough for God. But those deceptive lies just kept leading away from the truth Jesus offers. God's truth centers in the truth that Jesus is more than enough.

Battle life's lies with the truth of Jesus. Self-talk sounds like one of those topics on the fringe of science. But people who study how our brains work know that you listen to your own voice more than any of your friends, any news on the radio, any messages you get on the television or any bit of advertising. You formulate thoughts about yourself and reactions to what is going on around you, and then you play those messages on loop throughout your day. But some of those thoughts are wrong or inaccurate, or downright deceptive. We need to battle deceptions with the truth. The truth is you can't be perfect. You never will be. But Jesus was the only perfect person to inhabit the planet. The truth is you might not ever win everyone's approval or respect. But because of what Jesus did in his life, you are accepted by your Heavenly Father. You might avoid difficult problems in your life, but Jesus faced your soul's greatest threat head on at the cross. You might have a hard time being happy when things don't go your way, but Jesus took all the hardships that came his way willingly to give you ultimate happiness. You can blame all the people in your life for your struggles, but the truth is Jesus really took every failure from your life, every effort that falls short of God's expectations. He took them on himself to the cross and left them there. Life isn't always easy, but the truth is Jesus did what would have been impossible for you so you could have what you could never earn on your own. Life might not be fair, but the life and salvation Jesus gives you are the grace you don't deserve.

We celebrate the Reformation with the motto that we are saved in Christ alone by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed by Scripture alone. The alone is the truly revolutionary part. The alone is what keeps Reformation-minded believers today from falling back into lies from the outside and deceptions that whisper from our own hearts. See, most people could agree with Scripture, faith and grace. But "alone" lets us know it isn't me plus God. It's not some grace and some effort. It's not a dash faith and a dose of obedience. It's not partly what the Bible says and a big helping of what our society says. We have to be careful about

what we are consuming for our spiritual nourishment so we emphasize that Christ alone gives you more than just enough.

Jesus Christ alone gives true freedom. Jesus knows you are a believer. Jesus invites you to embrace his message. Jesus gives you the truth of his Word. The truth that Jesus did everything necessary is your escape from the tyranny of living up to everyone's demands. Jesus gives you the freedom from the crushing burden of trying to measure up to God's perfection on your own. Jesus liberates you from the uncertainty of trying to do your best for God and hoping he will give you grace to cover the difference. Jesus sets you free from the obligation to do it on your own. Jesus give you this confidence: **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36) Jesus paid your debt for sin with his sinless life. Jesus signs your release in his own blood. Jesus gives the freedom from thinking you are on probation or you have to work your way closer to God or earn a place on his good side. You have the freedom of knowing you are a child of God. You have all the rights and privileges Jesus earned by his life and sacrifice. You have free access in the household of God. In Jesus you have more than enough to enjoy true freedom with your Savior. Amen.