

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”.  
Amen

Out text for meditation for this morning / Reformation Sunday is from the gospel of John 8:31-36, which I read before. Let us pray: **O Lord, we pray, speak in the calming of our minds and in the longings of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.**

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500 hundred years ago, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest, posted 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg-Germany. And with this action the Reformation of the Church began. Our Lord, through the work of Martin Luther, once again brought the proclamation of the good news of our salvation back to light in the Christian Church. We are called to faithfulness to the promises of God. It is our joy to declare to all who will hear the forgiveness, life and salvation that God promises through His Son, Jesus Christ; for if the Son makes you free, you are free indeed.

The Reformation of the Church is something that is of great importance to the church in general, and especially for us Lutherans. Luther never had the intention of separating himself from the Church of Rome. Nor did he wish to found a new church. However, the events and abuses of the church of that time awoke in him a powerful indignation upon seeing the corruption of the gospel. The problem was that the pure message of the gospel had been hidden, buried, and covered in the churches, and in place of the message of Christ crucified for the liberation of all humanity, a mountain of rules, human traditions and insignificant regulations invented by men had been placed on the shoulders of God’s people.

Instead of hope in God for the solutions to the problems of this life, many believed that they could resolve their difficulties by satisfying certain requirements; that they could resolve their difficulties by their obedience to a bishop, or for such things like buying an indulgence, and that by these futile actions they thought that they could earn the favor of God and eternal life. But Luther discovered again that we can enjoy the acceptance of God; that God looks upon us with favor, with love, that He cares for us, and that we can truly hope for eternal life, not because we have done something, not because we have served or loved the Lord, but by faith in Christ, in what He has done and continues to do for us. And how did Luther discover this fundamental truth? By the word of God, that is, by the Holy Scriptures. You, me and everyone here are bound for what the Holy Bible says about the Grace of God, faith in Jesus, and our freedom that we have now because of Him.

Jesus says in our text for meditation, **“If you abide in my word, you will truly be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”** We all know, I believe, what happens when we place our trust in human beings. Once in a while they indeed do what they promise. But how many times have we trusted in someone to do something, and they say, “Do not worry. I will take care of it”? And what happens? We become frustrated and disappointed because he or she fails us. People can commit to all kinds of things, but many times they do not fulfill their promises. But God is not like that, because He does keep His promises. God has promised to save us from our sins, to care for us, to guide us, and to be with us at our side in difficulties times. Our God keeps His promises.

Jesus says that we are to “abide in His word.” Why? Because when we abide in His word; when we allow ourselves to be guided and instructed by His word; we will know the truth. It is true that sometimes the truth can seem pretty illusive. Sometimes it is difficult to discern the truth. When we read the newspaper or listen to something incredible, often we have to ask ourselves: How can that be? Often the news are out of proportion, even distorted, especially during political campaigns. We do not know what or whom we should believe. But Jesus clearly says that when we abide in His word, we will know the truth, and in reality this truth is something sure, something that is certain. He is talking about a truth that truly exists. And it includes all that God gives to us, and all that He does for us in Christ Jesus.

You may think that you do not have much, but all you have is from God. If we have children, they come from God. If we have what to eat, it comes from God. If we have cloth, or a home, all these come from the gracious will of God.

If we think a little, we all, I believe, will recognize how we have experienced God's blessings. We all can see the power of God in our lives, how he has been with us, how he has helped us in times of pain or anguish or when we feel overwhelmed or exhausted. This is not to say that we do not have doubts once in a while. There are times in life when we ask ourselves, why God do I have to go through this? Why me? Sometimes it is difficult for us to understand why.

However, we can understand an important truth, and we can trust in this truth, which is that God cares for us and loves us so much, as the famous Bible verse says, "he has given his only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16. This is the truth Jesus is talking about in today's text. That in spite of our rebellion, our egoism, our sin, we have been redeemed and liberated and we now have joy and peace with God because of what Christ has done for us. It is something that we know personally. It is something that we know by remaining faithful and firm in His word. And this truth has a great impact in our lives.

Before Luther understood the gospel, he lived a life of constant fear, even terror. When he read phrases in the bible like "the righteousness of God," it made him afraid. He reasoned that if God is all powerful and at the same time holy and righteous, He must be very angry with us human beings. That is why he tried with all his might to achieve the approval of God by fasting, by praying, with every kind of practice of religious piety. He would beat himself; he would spend the entire night in prayer and meditation. He fasted so much that he ruined his digestive system for life. But the more that he punished himself, the more he felt the weight of his sin. He could not find peace and freedom in his acts of self-denial. But one day, the gospel came to him as a brilliant ray of sunlight in his world of darkness and despair, when he found the words of Paul: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . . Because in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Rom. 1:16-17"**

Friends in Christ; can you imagine the change in the life of Luther when he went from the belief that God was an angry judge who was out to punish him for every wrong, to the understanding that God was a loving God, a loving God who forgave his sins because of the work of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross? Can you imagine how that changed everything for Luther? God is satisfied with the payment made by his son Jesus Christ. This is the great difference between our faith and other religious systems that humans have created around the world.

While other religions seek to satisfy God through works, or sacrifices, or meditation, or whatever it may be, our religion is called a "faith," because we have faith that God truly forgives us and loves us and saves us and protects us and guides us all the time. It is such a blessing to know that we can be forgiven. For without forgiveness heaven would be an empty place. But forgiveness should never be an excuse to compromise the faith delivered to us by Jesus Christ. God keep us from doing this!

God calls us to be different. Just as the salmon swims upstream in the lakes and the rivers to return to the brook where it first spawned, Jesus calls every one of His disciples to walk against the flow of worldly traffic, allowing no compromise in His teaching. There are many perils and dangers along the way, but the promise of Jesus is that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age. God's truth makes true disciples. And the truth will set us free.

People of God, we are so accustomed to making compromises in everyday life. A husband and wife have to compromise their personal plans in order to build a life together. An employee must compromise his freedom and submit to his employer in order to hold a job. These are fair and right. But with God's word there is to be no compromise whatsoever. Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will pass away, but the word of God will never pass away." Only as we remain in Christ's teachings, we will remain his true disciples, and we will endure when all things fail. It is true that all who call on the name of Jesus will be saved. That is precisely what we must uphold. This is how gracious God is.

But at the same time, the believer in Jesus will honor his words, "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 Christian is to remain in the teaching of Jesus above all things.

So my friends in Christ - give thanks to God for being faithful to His promises. Thanks be to God for people like the great reformer Martin Luther. Reformation Sunday reminds to all of us that we are saved *by grace alone, by faith alone, and*

*by Scripture alone. Thanks be to God that He has saved us not for what we can do, but for what Christ did on the cross for us. Amen*