

Sermon for October 24, 2015

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Freedom, that word goes to the core of who we believe ourselves to be as Americans. We say that we are the land of the free and the home of the brave. And yet Jesus’ definition of freedom is different from ours. In our reading for today Jesus is telling a group of Jewish followers that if they continue in his word they would learn the truth and the truth will set them free.

Well, that didn’t set too well with them because they become indignant and tell Jesus that they’ve never been slaves to anyone and don’t need to be set free. As I hear this I’m thinking to myself, “Really, you’ve never been slaves to anyone. What about your time in Egypt? Your whole Passover Festival is based on God freeing you. What about the Babylonian captivity? And even now you are slaves to the Roman Empire who have armed soldiers in your country.”

But before we get to feeling too superior to those listening to Jesus; let’s think for a moment about what freedom means to us. I go back to when I was a teenager. I remember thinking that I couldn’t wait until I turned eighteen because then I would be an adult and I could go where I wanted with whomever I wanted and do whatever I wanted for as long as I wanted. Isn’t that how we define freedom—being able to do what I want? And that’s where we run into trouble.

Today we’re celebrating Reformation Sunday and honoring Martin Luther and his part in the reformation. Luther defined sin as being when a person turns in on themselves—when we are being self-centered and following our wants and

desires. And isn't that how we define freedom—being able to do whatever we want. So in our definition of freedom; we become slaves to ourselves and aren't free at all.

And that's just what Jesus is describing in our reading when he tells us that "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." We don't like being told that we are slaves anymore than Jesus' followers did. Paul tells it like it is in our Romans reading today, "For there is no distinction, since **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All of us are sinners, every single one of us is a slave to sin.

If we were to end there we'd be a sorry lot indeed, but it doesn't end there. Jesus also tells us, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Jeremiah tells us in the first reading today, "For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." When I hear this I have a hard time believing it—God's going to forget everything that I've done! How's that possible? Paul tells us in our reading from Romans for today, "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." Or as Martin Luther puts it in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the virgin Mary, is our Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, bought me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with

silver and gold, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”

We are free from sin! We have been bought with a great price and now have the choice of turning away from ourselves; of turning away from our desires and to turn towards the other. We have been freed from sin, death and the power of the devil so that we can turn in service to our neighbors! By staying connected to Jesus’ word we see that giving is more important to getting.

We have the choice to give out of love to others or to turn in on ourselves in self-centeredness. We have been made free—now what are we to do with that freedom?