

October 27, 2019 Reformation Sunday
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 8:31-36

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the eighth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

³¹Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Today, Jesus speaks to those who have come to trust him...and he tells them that if they make themselves at home in his word, they will be free.

John’s gospel is full of this idea of making a home, of abiding, of setting up camp – us with God...and God with us.

It’s probably different than the way we usually think of our relationship to the word of God...being at home in it. More often, I think we imagine that we are supposed to know it, and believe it, and obey it, and understand it...and there may be an extent to which those things are true...but we are also to be at home in it.

God’s Word was so precious to our teacher Martin Luther, it is an appropriate thing to think about this Reformation Sunday. Luther found his spiritual

liberation in his own reading of Scripture. He found the promise of love and grace that he was able to learn to trust more than his fear of not being good enough for God. And he worked to make it possible for others to come closer to God's word...translating the New Testament into German...so that the Bible could be put into the hands of more than just the priests and elites. Today it is also fitting that we bless the Bibles that will be put into the hands of children and adults alike today – especially for Nora and Carter. And I trust that God's word is and will continue to be a home for them.

I do so love this idea of dwelling in God's word...making our home there. But what is that really like?

I wonder where you have been most at home in your life...? In that place called home...did you have a favorite spot...and a favorite time of day to go there...when the sun or the breeze was just right? Maybe there's a favorite blanket or chair. Probably you also knew the place well enough to shuffle around in the dark without banging your shins when you needed to. Or you had learned the knack of the sticky doorknob or tricky drawer.

Maybe it's a place alive with stories.

What if God's word was like that to us? Certainly, we probably have favorite parts...or parts that are just right at just the right time. Maybe we've learned the exact maneuver to unstick a tricky part. Maybe there is much of it that still feels unlearned or mysterious...like the attic or closet felt when you were younger.

Do we really make a home in God's word?

Perhaps. And...perhaps it takes a more childlike faith than I still have to really do this.

There is a story I always remember when I think about being at home in God's Word, in our sacred story, this way...It's not even really a story, actually...It's just a holy moment...when a parent peeked into the room of their young child.

She was probably not more than four or five...She loved her storybooks...and they were so real to her. Her mother saw her one day, with an open book on the floor...and she watched the little girl step earnestly onto the open pages and close her eyes. It was the best way she knew how to express how much she wanted to be inside the story.

She wanted to be at home in it...like Jesus invites us to be at home in his word.

But then, of course...this is the gospel of John...which opens with the cosmic hymn of the universe's first breaths...To be at home in the word doesn't just mean to be home in what Jesus teaches...or even in all of the sacred scriptures. Because... "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." When we are at home in God's Word...we haven't decoded a secret book...or built a fortress of right ideas. Being at home in God's Word...is being at home in Christ, himself. Christ is the Word...who is with God...and is God...from the very beginning.

And if we abide in him...this is where he tells us we will find freedom.

Now...I don't know if you feel like the friends that were around Jesus that day when you hear this...who didn't really know why Jesus was telling them about being free.

Do we need to be made free, people of God? Or have we never been slaves to anyone?

Most of us in this room don't have enslaved ancestors in our immediate history...and yet...when we deny being captive, we forget our own story...just like they did. Because when any one of us is enslaved, we all are. We are one body...and we forget too quickly that any suffering of any of us belongs to all of us...as much as any joy. Some of our cages may be much more beautiful than others...but as long as there is sin we are all its prisoners.

So, I wonder what you imagine it would be like to feel truly free...?

Is there an anchor that is holding you down...that if it let go you could find the lightness in your being again? Is there a tether that could be cut so you could fly free?

I think that is how we often imagine freedom – chains, bonds...broken.

But I would like to suggest to you today...that, actually...we are not freed from bonds...we are freed for them. I'll say it again. We are not freed from bonds. We are freed for them. I think, too often, our captivity is an isolation – a denial of how connected we truly are. So, to be free is to come deeper down to earth...not float away free of it...to reach out farther into connection...not to escape it.

When Jesus speaks these words...the “you” he is speaking to is not just you or me...any one of us at a time...It's all of us together. We are made for liberation...and we are only free when we are all free.

And this is a part of the beauty of the Reformation...because Luther discovered a new corner of the home he had been living in...in God's word...that changed everything. It turned a haunted house full of fears and danger or punishment into a home a love and grace...and he wanted to share that with others. And you know what? The discovery continues...because Martin didn't finish the work...he didn't even fully live into the beauty of his own discovery. And we probably won't either. But the Spirit of God will keep winging its way through the world and the church...

And Jesus will keep inviting us to make a home in him...and in our sacred story...and with one another...because when we do. We are free. Free to love. Free to live without fear. Free to be who we have always been – the children of God.

So, dwell in God's Word. Dwell in Christ – who is the fullest form of what God has ever wanted to say to us. And may the Spirit of Reformation continue to call us into the future, into relationship and into freedom.

Thanks be to God. Amen.