

## “Thank God, I’m Free at Last”

Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Roman 3:19-28 (Series A, Reformation Sunday, 2020) Ps. 46

John 8:31-36

Let us pray:

“Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last” This ends the famous “I Have a Dream” speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. some three decades ago, the well-known civil rights activist. What a powerful case Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made for the freedom – the true freedom – of African Americans from discrimination and institutional racism.

Today, we celebrate Reformation Day. And we have on our minds another Martin Luther – the original one. He too was concerned with freedom, but of a different kind. He too had some powerful words to share.

His famous speech, the “Here I Stand” speech, was uttered before the Roman Emperor who told him to recant or face the consequences. For Luther, a different kind of freedom was at stake.

And then there is Jesus Christ himself, whose words in John 8 tell us what true freedom is really about. Freedom from *sin*, which comes by knowing the truth. Freedom from *slavery*. Freedom as sons and daughters. This freedom in Christ, the freedom of the Gospel, is what the Reformation of the Church was all about, and what it's still all about today.

We in North America we think of freedom, as freedom to work any where we want, to practice what any religion we want, to choose what to eat and how to dress. Whether to wear a mask or not even in the midst of global pandemic. But liberty, freedom, is much more than just this kind of thinking.

Throughout the ages, people have often been enslaved – or at least had their freedoms limited. The ugly history of African slavery in Americas is just one chapter in the long story of humans being cruel to one another.

Dictators and tyrants of all fashions have enslaved and taken captive various peoples for various reasons. I just heard sometime ago, that there are some 25-40 million people around the world today who are still effectively living in slavery.

Slaves are treated poorly, usually. They are considered to be worth less than the free man. Perhaps not even thought of as persons, but as property to be used and abused at the master's will. None of us would like to be a slave of any kind in any place or time of history.

But we're not here today for a history lesson or a lecture on contemporary social justice. We have bigger fish to fry. Jesus gets to the heart of it, Slavery to sin is the real problem. Since everyone who sins is a slave to sin, then that must include all of us. This slavery cuts across ethnic and national lines.

It is a slavery of the rich and poor alike. It affects all who have Adam's blood running through their veins. All who have inherited his nature and likeness. We are slaves from birth. Slaves to sin and under the shadow of the death sin brings.

But this slavery goes deeper. Every time we do wrong, every time we break the law, sin becomes our master all the more. Though we are born into the slavery of original sin, we have no hope of working or earning our way free.

Sin rules our lives, our speech, even our thoughts. Everything we do is touched and tainted by sin. We are captives. We wouldn't even know how to get out of our predicament, much less where to run if we could. And what a cruel master sin is. It causes us heartaches and pain while promising pleasures untold.

Sin brings discord and dissension, war, suffering and death. Sin is worse, because it separates us from our true master and Lord, the one who created us in his own image – an image now smeared and unholy. We are slaves to the cruel master sin which would bring us to the worst of places – an eternity separated from our God.

As slaves to sin, we are also prisoners. There is no escaping to an underground railroad of good works. There is no sneaking away from sin, or fighting it. We are not strong enough. We are helpless, and we are hopeless. Until Jesus comes.

Jesus tells us the truth that sets us free. What is this truth? We call it the Gospel. The Good News. The Good News that he, Jesus Christ, died on the cross to earn forgiveness for your sins. The Good News is not that we have the opportunity to pay for our own sins.

The Good News is not that if we try hard enough, God will do the rest. The Good News is that Jesus has done it all – as a pure gift, free, without cost – by grace.

He is the truth that sets us free, he is the way to the Father, he is the life that never dies. The way, the truth, the life, Jesus Christ. His Gospel sets us free from sin, death and the devil, and even from hell itself.

William Wilberforce saw the evil of slavery and thus, used parliament in England to abolish slavery in the British Empire. In America's history, one man in particular is credited with freeing the slaves. Abraham Lincoln, who delivered the Emancipation Proclamation and thus declared all slaves in the southern states to be free.

We Christians have an even greater Emancipator, who frees us from an even worse slavery. Jesus Christ declares, proclaims: *"The Truth will set you free"*. Jesus Christ wins the freedom for you, for me, and for all the world.

He paid a bloody price, gave his own body into death, so that we are freed for eternal life. And he still gives his own body and blood to us, in his Supper, for the forgiveness of our sins, for our life and salvation.

Martin Luther was an ordinary man whom God used to bring the truth to light again. It was never fully lost, only obscured. The church was never really enslaved, but she was beset by false teaching.

Martin Luther's five pillars of the Reformation:

- Sola Scriptura ... Scripture Alone,
- Sola Fide ... Faith Alone,
- Sola Gratia .. Grace Alone,
- Solus Christus ... Christ Alone, and
- Soli Deo Gloria ... To the Glory of God alone.

So, in his great mercy, God brought reform and renewal. That's what the Reformation was about, and what we remember on this day. Many of those who taught and preached falsely repented, and learned about freedom anew.

My freedom in Christ came in 1969, because of the joy of knowing Jesus and his freedom my service to others is filled with joy. If we served our Lord grudgingly, it would not be service.

True service, true worship, true discipleship reflects the joy that we have because of Christ.

- What a joy to have a Saviour who loves us!
- What a joy to know that our sins are forgiven!
- What a joy to know that Jesus gives eternal life!

Today we too step back and appreciate the freedom of the Gospel – freedom from sin, freedom from death, and freedom to live as Christ's people, walking in his light. If you continue in my word...you are truly my disciples...the truth will make you free...and you will be free indeed. "The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel . . . and the grace of God."

Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die but live forever." When I begin to practice that teaching in my daily life is when I begin to understand what Jesus was saying.

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are Truly my disciples." In other words, there are people who claim to be Jesus' disciples but are not because they do not continue to immerse themselves in his Word.

You will know the truth. When you immerse yourself in the Word, you will know the truth about many crucial values in life. You will know the truth about death, that you are not to fear it, that death is not the last word.

You will know the truth about forgiveness, that the forgiveness of Christ is as essential as bread and water, sunshine and rain, for life in its fullness to exist. You will know the truth about suffering, that suffering can build character.

You will know the truth about loving God and your neighbor, and that your neighbor is all people on this planet. You will know the truth about wisdom, wisdom for loving for spouse, wisdom for loving your children, wisdom for daily life. You will know the truth about Christ, that Christ is the Heart and Mind and Spirit of God, God in human form, God's own Son.

The truth will make you free. When you know Christ, you will know what it means to be free...even when you are politically enslaved, even when you are broken and can't pay for the next meal, even when we are hung up on your own selfishness, even when we are afraid of dying. Even when we are fully human and bound by sin, you will find freedom in Christ.

This morning, you and I want to be free. You and I want to taste the flavors of freedom, smell the aromas of freedom, touch the feelings of freedom. Because God made you and I in his image, you and I want to be free.

May this precious saving, teaching, guiding grace of God be yours this day, and may Christ's call to obey God's commandments guide us to a renewed love of God's word--the Sword of the Spirit, with which we can win the battles of our lives. Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last! **Amen.**

October 24, 2020