

Freedom in Christ Alone

Text: John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

On April 16, 1521; a German monk named Martin Luther rode into the city of Worms, expecting to be taken prisoner and ultimately put to death for his teachings that were contrary to the centuries old doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. When he arrived in Worms, the assembled Diet had to postpone their meeting with Luther due to other domestic matters of the realm. Finally, on April 18, 1521 at 6:00 pm, Luther was brought into the great hall and was asked if the writings on the table before him were his own and, if so, would he recant, that is take back what he had written. The German monk argued that he could not for not all the writings were the same and some of them had been praised by the Catholic church. Yet, the councilor representing the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope pressed Luther, "Will you recant? Answer us, without horns and teeth". And so Luther did, declaring that if what he had written could be proven to be wrong by Scripture then he would throw his books into the fire. Listen to Luther's reply:

"Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason-I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other-my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

So what Pastor? Why should we care about Luther and what he did at the Diet of Worms? Because what Luther said at Worms came down to one thing: TRUTH. TRUTH. Luther cared, not about splitting the church, he didn't want that at all. Rather, he cared about the truth of God's Word alone. Luther cared about truth because he cared, as any Pastor should, about the souls of his parishioners. That's why his stand to not recant was so important. Because to recant would be to deny the truth of God's Holy Word, particularly on matters of doctrine like the Lord's Supper, justification, salvation through grace alone, etc.

It was the truth that Jesus spoke about in our Gospel text this morning that Luther was adamantly defending, **"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the**

truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32). That’s truth from the source of all truth Himself. But why was defending truth so important? I mean after all, isn’t truth whatever we want it to be? Defending truth is important because eternity is important and not whatever we want it to be. There is only one truth and that is + Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, who came to die on the cross in order that our sins might be forgiven.

Brothers and sisters in + Christ, when Jesus speaks about Himself being the truth, He is telling us that truth matters in this world, so much so that it is a matter of life or death. The world will throw a lot at us about what truth really is: homosexuality is truth. Abortion is truth. They gender I identity myself as is truth. The list could go on and on. The point is that our fallen sinful world has gotten away from the truth found in + Jesus Christ and His Word. The world’s view of truth has permeated our homes, our schools, and yes, even our churches. As a result of sin’s grasps on truth in this world, the cry for the Holy Christian and Apostolic church to take a bold stand in the preaching, teaching, and sharing of the Gospel is needed now more than ever.

But before we as the church can say, “Here I Stand” in our lost dark world, we must first take a look at ourselves in the message we preach, teach, and confession. Do we believe that + Jesus is the “Way, the Truth, and the Life?” If so, are our actions matching what we are saying? If we “abide in the Word of God”, then that means that we agree with everything that God’s Word says, right? How do we know if we never read open our Bibles? Sometimes, we don’t like the truth of God’s Word because it convicts us. The love of God given to us in the Law comes in and breaks open our hardened hearts. So that as our hearts lay open before God; raw, vulnerable, hurt, and dead, the sweet Gospel comes along and gives us life, healing us with Holy Words of absolution, mercy, and grace.

Because our sins are forgiven and we have been set free through the shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross, then that means that doctrine like the Lord’s Supper, justification, salvation through grace alone are important to us too. Don’t let the word “justification” scare you, it simply means, that in + Jesus death on the cross for us, He removed our guilt and the penalty of sin. **We must understand this, as Christians and as Lutherans,** if we are to be a church that takes a stand for what we believe in a world that so desperately needs us. Yes, truth matters. God’s truth matters. God’s truth found in God’s Holy Word alone matters. + Jesus is the truth that matters for us, that truth that saves us, the truth that frees us from the shackles of sin.

Friends, abide in the truth of our Savior. Abide in the truth that God so loves us that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him, in His truth, will not perish but have eternal life. Abide in His promise that our sins are forgiven, that we are His dear precious children whom He has bought and paid for on the cross and whom wears His robes of righteousness. Abide in the truth that God is always with us, from the cradle to the grave, in the valleys and on the mountain tops. Abide in Christ with joy, peace, and love in our hearts and in doing so, share the joy, peace, and love of Christ with the world.

It won't be easy and Jesus never said it would be. But taking a stand for Jesus never is. People will laugh at us, mock us, curse us, reject the Gospel that we share with them. That is what happened to Martin Luther. It got so bad that he was even excommunicated, declared a heretic, and a bounty placed on his head for the faith he confessed and the truth of His Savior. Could our confession of the Truth be so bold that we'd be willing to die for it too?

Thankfully, we have the promise that God's Word of Truth will never return void. God's Word will accomplish its mission. God's Word of Truth will change hearts and lives. God's Word of Truth will grow the church. That is what happened in the Reformation. Luther once put it like this, "I did nothing. The Word did everything." Thanks be to God that the Truth of His Word does everything today as well. May our Lutheran Christian confession be as bold, now and always.

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen." (Martin Luther)

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus. Amen.