



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

For those of you who are life-long Lutherans think with me this morning about the last 50 years. Transitions in the Lutheran church were amazing. We have had 3 new hymnals, red to green to cranberry. We worship in many styles, traditional and contemporary with new music on instruments other than an organ. We ordain women. The LCA and ALC became the ELCA. Church headquarters moved from New York to Minneapolis to Chicago. Synod presidents became our bishops. We have altar fellowship with the Presbyterians, Methodists, United Church of Christ and the Episcopalians. With all these changes it is sometimes difficult to recognize our Lutheran Church today.

Now let's go back 500 plus years to Luther's day and see what the Reformation transitions were like for the people living in the 1500's.

The Bible which only priests had been able to read was now available to be read by all in their own languages. Worship services were also in the language of the people. Ministers were allowed to marry. Luther endorsed 2 sacraments instead of the 7 of the Roman church as they were the only ones commanded by God. The Crucifix was an art form for the past and the empty cross was now prevalent as a symbol of the resurrected Christ. Relics and statues were removed from places of worship. No more prayers to the saints

but rather the idea of direct communication with God in the name of Jesus was catching on. Scripture alone was beginning to be the authority of the church, not a pope. No more waiting to get to heaven from purgatory or paying for a relative or friend to get out of this in between time and go to heaven. WOW! As you can see lots and lots of transitions.

These changes of the Reformation were drastic. 504 years ago, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg Germany, things changed. They changed back to Scripture alone, faith alone, in Christ alone all by God's grace alone.

And as we look at the Gospel text today from John, it is clear to me that Luther felt freedom to live by these verses. He had spent too much of his life trying to be "good enough" and never could get to that point. Doing the right things does not make a person right before God. Just as you could not buy an indulgence, a piece of paper that would get Aunt Gertrude out of purgatory and into heaven. Nothing we can do will make us right before God. And Luther found no evidence in Scripture that there even was such a thing as purgatory. There was this life and the next only. Nothing we can do to make ourselves right before God. It is rather our relationship with Jesus and the rightness of His life that becomes ours.

I hear the second lesson in our Gospel story this morning morphing into the fact that it is not about us and what we do, but rather about how we let Jesus into our lives. That is the truth that Luther came to know. It was never enough to keep the commandments and live a good Christian life, but rather being in God's word and understanding what Christ has done for us is what it most important. We are saved by God's grace alone in Christ alone.

Another thought I get out of this passage is that it is not the "What" of our faith, but rather the "Whom" that is important. Here's what I mean. In Luther's day as in ours, there was great controversy about what the church believed, what the church taught. Probably why we are a confessional church today and cling to the Apostles and Nicene creeds. The writings that came out of the reformation, from Luther and Melancthon, what we call our Lutheran Confessions, are still what we teach and confess today. Truly they are important, just as is living the godly life, but the "what's" of our faith never will be trumped by the "whom" of our faith. This is the truth that Luther discovered, verse 31 & 32 "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." This is the freedom of the Christian life. We no longer need to fear life or death as

Jesus has taken care of that on the cross. He lived, he died and rose again for us to have freedom. And it is this freedom in Jesus that sets us free.

Here is what Luther said in his dissertation The Freedom of the Christian: “It’s not the teachings of the Church that set a man free, but the one about which the Church teaches that gives a man freedom.” “It’s not about the doctrines of what we believe,” he wrote “that leads us into the kingdom, but the one who rules the kingdom that leads us to know what’s right.”

This week at our text study, we had a new young vicar that joined us, and she talked about all the things we are freed from. It was interesting to hear this young lady, fresh from seminary talk about how we are free in Jesus. We talked about politics, pandemics, technology and the like. We are free from all these things, so they do not have hold on what is important in our lives. But my question to her was “if we are free from these things in Jesus Christ, what are we free for? We are free to love and serve God and to love and serve our neighbor as ourselves.

This is our truth. Our truth is not found in some teaching, in some drop of wisdom discovered by even Luther, but it is in the person and promise and plan revealed and made complete in Jesus Christ. John’s Gospel especially talks a lot about the “Truth”. From Genesis to Revelation, in Scripture alone we hear the story of Jesus and that becomes our truth, grounded and secure because Jesus is the one who is the Truth. Our faith stands and falls on Jesus. Our truth is that Jesus, is the Son of God. That is what Luther and the other reformers discovered and why they felt the need to reform the thinking of the church. And today that truth is our hope. Jesus is the Savior of our world. He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Step by step we are called to walk freely in the way of faith, always remembering to remain steeped in His Word. The opportunities we are given time and time again to live out our call to love God and our neighbor are amazing. So, disciples, continue in God’s word and you will be free indeed!

AMEN