

Reformation Sunday 📖, October 25, 2020

## Before the Truth Is Finished

**Y**ou will know the truth," Jesus said, "and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

"The truth will set you free," David Foster Wallace wrote, "but not until it's finished with you."

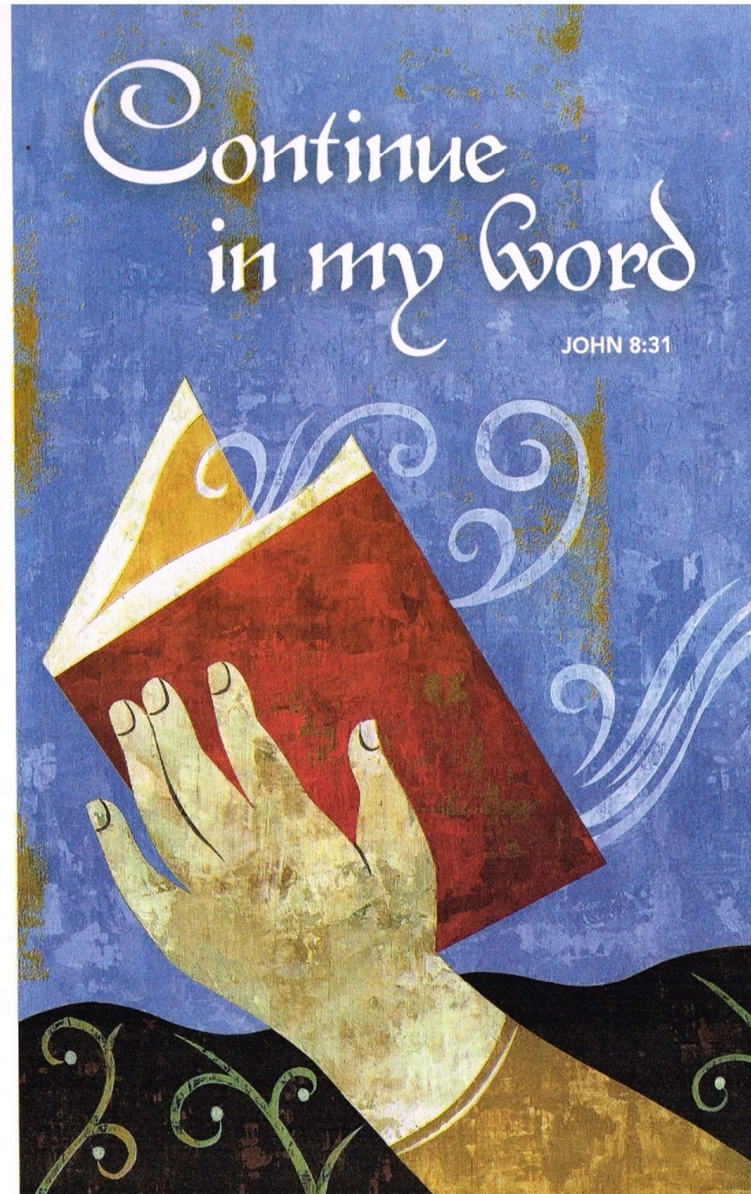
Before the truth is finished with us, it demands that we admit that we are not already free. We are enslaved to sin. This is the part of the truth that Luther called the law: the hard part that points out that we are controlled by our fears and desires, our self-absorption and self-doubt, our addictions and facades.

Here's the truth: You are not your Sunday best or your Facebook profile. You are broken, and enslaved by your attempts to cover it up. That can be hard to hear, but until it sinks in we are unable to be released and receive the truth of the gospel, the good news of grace.

Today we celebrate Reformation Day, and in the spirit of Martin Luther the church must be always reforming, always pointing beyond itself to God's grace. The temptation is always there to settle for so little: a cozy collective of our most presentable selves, the right side of social issues, pat answers to incomprehensible mysteries of the universe.

Jesus' invitation is to bring the mess that we're in, the mess that we *are*. We are called to show up as our true selves, fears and regrets and doubts and all. God can handle it. The communion of saints—that is, *us*, the people of God—can handle it. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are free.

The truth of God that sets us free first tears us open. Church can and must be a place where we bring our broken-open selves and encounter the healing power of a God who sees us, knows us, loves us as we are, and sets us free.



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# Celebrate

Reformation Sunday

October 25, 2020

*Rooted in the past and growing into the future, the church must always be reformed in order to live out the love of Christ in an ever-changing world. We celebrate the good news of God's grace, that Jesus Christ sets us free every day to do this life-transforming work. Trusting in the freedom given to us in baptism, we pray for the church, that Christians will unite more fully in worship and mission.*

## Prayer of the Day

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Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## First Reading

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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*The renewed covenant will not be breakable, but like the old covenant it will expect the people to live upright lives. To know the LORD means that one will defend the cause of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:16). The renewed covenant is possible only because the LORD will forgive iniquity and not remember sin. Our hope lies in a God who forgets.*

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," 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.

Psalm

Psalm 46; refrain, Ps. 46:7

The LORD of hosts is with us; the  
God of Ja - cob is our strong - hold.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp). The first staff contains the melody for the first line of text, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are printed below the notes.

God is our ref-<sup>1</sup>uge and strength,  
a very present<sup>1</sup> help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, though the<sup>1</sup> earth be moved,  
and though the mountains shake in the depths<sup>1</sup> of the sea;

<sup>3</sup>though its waters<sup>1</sup> rage and foam,  
and though the mountains tremble<sup>1</sup> with its tumult.

<sup>4</sup>There is a river whose streams make glad the cit-<sup>1</sup>y of God,  
the holy habitation of<sup>1</sup> the Most High.

<sup>5</sup>God is in the midst of the city; it shall<sup>1</sup> not be shaken;  
God shall help it at the<sup>1</sup> break of day.

<sup>6</sup>The nations rage, and the<sup>1</sup> kingdoms shake;  
God speaks, and the earth<sup>1</sup> melts away. **R**

<sup>7</sup>The LORD of<sup>1</sup> hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob<sup>1</sup> is our stronghold.

<sup>8</sup>Come now, regard the works<sup>1</sup> of the LORD,  
what desolations God has brought up-<sup>1</sup> on the earth;

<sup>9</sup>behold the one who makes war to cease in<sup>1</sup> all the world;  
who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,  
and burns the<sup>1</sup> shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup>“Be still, then, and know that<sup>1</sup> I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations;  
I will be exalted<sup>1</sup> in the earth.”

<sup>11</sup>The LORD of<sup>1</sup> hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob<sup>1</sup> is our stronghold. **R**

## Second Reading

Romans 3:19-28

*Paul's words stand at the heart of the preaching of Martin Luther and other Reformation leaders. No human beings make themselves right with God through works of the law. We are brought into a right relationship with God through the divine activity centered in Christ's death. This act is a gift of grace that liberates us from sin and empowers our faith in Jesus Christ.*

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

<sup>21</sup>But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, <sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup>they are now justified by his grace as a gift,

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>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; <sup>26</sup>it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

## Gospel

John 8:31-36

*Jesus speaks of truth and freedom as spiritual realities known through his word. He reveals the truth that sets people free from sin.*

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." <sup>33</sup>They 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'?"

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

## Prayers of Intercession

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*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

*A brief silence.*

Renew and inspire the church in the freedom of the gospel, O God. Where the church is in error, reform it. Where the church speaks your truth, strengthen it. Where the church is divided, unify it. Ignite in us the working of the Holy Spirit. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As the earth changes, as mountains shake and the waters roar, may we care for this planet as a holy habitation for all living things. Sustain all peoples and lands recovering from natural disasters of any kind (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guide areas of the world divided or traumatized by conflict, especially in our own land. Free all from slavery and human trafficking, and protect all in harm's way. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Release those living in bondage to debts, chronic pain, or addiction. Grant healing touch to those who are ill (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In this family of faith we give thanks for courageous voices that have remained firm in their commitment to the one who frees us from sin and death. Centered in your grace, unify us in the hope of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Even in death, you free us and give us a place in your house. We give thanks for our ancestors who have shown us truth and freedom, especially Martin Luther and those who work for the renewal of the church. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

## Preparing for Next Week

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**Monday** (commemoration of Philipp Nicolai, died 1608; Johann Heermann, died 1647; Paul Gerhardt, died 1676; hymnwriters) Psalm 119:41-48. **Tuesday** James 2:14-26. **Wednesday** (Simon and Jude, Apostles) John 14:21-27. **Thursday** Psalm 43. **Friday** 2 Peter 2:1-3. **Saturday** (Reformation Day) John 8:31-36. **All Saints Day** Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12.

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