

John 8:31-36

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday. What is Reformation Sunday? A day set aside to celebrate the continual rebirth of the church. It began with Martin Luther innocently tacking up what we refer to as the 95 theses... Actually, they were 95 things he thought the church could improve. It was not unusual in his time to post one's thoughts on the church doors at Wittenberg, maybe it could be considered a very early form of Facebook. Unfortunately, he touched upon some of the religious leaders' hallowed money making ideas and sacred thoughts, for which he was condemned as a heretic and brought up on charges. After a harrowing ordeal he escaped and the Lutheran Church, the first of the protestant churches, was formed. And our churches continue to be formed and re-formed sometimes within a denomination and sometimes as ideas about what the Bible says differ new branches of denominations, or non-denominational churches form.

What does Jesus have to say about this? Today's gospel reading from John tells us that Jesus Christ, by his faith, has freed us to look at the truth in a new way. Jesus was a Jew; his followers are Christians. The Christian faith can be looked at as a re-forming of the Jewish faith. Those who follow Christ believe that he is the Messiah sent to save the world. While the Messianic Jews believe that Jesus is the Messiah, they follow some of the Jewish customs that Christians do not, and do not follow some of the customs that Christians do follow. Both celebrate Easter.

But in today's reading the resurrection has not taken place yet, and the people whom he is addressing don't truly understand the importance Jesus has as the Messiah. They cannot understand how Jesus will make them free. Although they could have considered him a warrior king, like King David, sent to set them free from the oppressive Roman rule, that isn't indicated here in this text. What is indicated is that they are in denial.

They are denying that they have ever been slaves to anyone which simply is not true. Perhaps they are referring to their faith which has always been free to worship God, but they have been held in physical slavery first by Egypt, then by the Babylonians, and to some extent in the society they are living in at the time of the gospel, by the Romans. Although they are not forced to work for nothing, they are forced to do whatever a Roman soldier tells them to do or face death by the sword. Even so, Jesus isn't speaking of physical slavery. Jesus is speaking of slavery to sin and death. Through Jesus our sins are forgiven. Through Jesus we find eternal life. And through Jesus we find the freedom to move toward something greater.

Through Jesus we are given the opportunity to explore who we are, and we can mess up and ask for forgiveness. Through Jesus we can be our true self. We are given the opportunity to imagine and re-imagine who we are; we can form and re-form our thoughts, beliefs, ideas and lives. Yet if we read this passage carefully it begins with the phrase, "If you continue in my word... the truth will make you free." It is the relationship we have with Jesus that makes us free to know that the truth of God is revealed through Jesus Christ; it is not an abstract truth, it is the truth of God found in Jesus. The truth that God loves us, that God invites us into the household, God wants us to be God's children.

When Jesus says the slave does not have a permanent place in the household, we believe he is speaking of those who are enslaved to sin because they have rejected Christ. We all sin, there's no doubt about that. But because of our belief in forgiveness through Jesus the Christ, we have a place in the household of God. This household isn't just a place somewhere after our human lives, but it is also on earth where we share together in the sacraments, especially the

Lord's Supper, as we are strengthened in community and strengthened by the body and blood of Jesus.

A new covenant has been promised by God through the prophet Jeremiah in today's reading from Jeremiah 31. The meal of Holy Communion makes us a part of that covenant because Jesus has proclaimed he is the new covenant, as in the one promised by Jeremiah. We are drawn into a covenant where we proclaim the one true God is our God. A covenant where the sins we commit are forgiven through the son of God, Jesus the Christ.

The words of Jeremiah compare this covenant to that of a husband to his wife. It is important to remember in the time of Jeremiah marriage was not an equal partnership. The man was in charge, women were considered property. Are we God's property? God created us. Everything we have is because of God. But we do not have to accept God as a wife was forced to accept her husband in those days. We are free to choose whether or not we want to be a member of the household, a child of God. We choose to accept God because of the love he has shown to us through his Son.

The people of Jeremiah's time lived under the law of Moses; they were promised a land to live in if they would do God's will. Paul, in the letter to the Romans that we heard today, writes about the law. He says we are held accountable to God, at one time it was through the law, but now it is through the faith of Jesus Christ. Paul says we have received God's grace through Jesus' sacrifice of atonement which is effective through Jesus' faith. No longer are we held accountable by the law of Moses, we are held accountable to the law of faith. And in this faith we are set free to become who God has created us to be.

The lyrics of the hymn, "Lord, Keep us Steadfast in Your Word" by Martin Luther reflect the meaning of how our faith is continually reformed through Jesus Christ. It says:

Lord, keep us steadfast in your word; curb those who by deceit or sword
would wrest the kingdom from your Son and bring to naught all he has done.
Lord Jesus Christ, your pow'r make known, for you are Lord of lords alone;
defend your holy church, that we may sing your praise eternally.
O Comforter of priceless worth, send peace and unity on earth;
support us in our final strife and lead us out of death to life.

This allows us to hear that it is the Lord who keeps us steadfast in our faith, in our thoughts and beliefs, in our life, and allows us to grow in our understanding. It is through the faith and power of the Lord Jesus that the church is formed and reformed into what God expects from God's people. And it is Jesus who brings us life's victory.

When we live out of the word of Jesus, when we are disciples, followers of him, we are granted forgiveness, new life, and a place in the family of God. A place where we are not, will not be, nor should we desire to be equal with God. A place where God's love supplies all our needs and fills us with a love so strong that we cannot contain it. It spills out into our lives and influences everything we think, do and say. God's control is born in love, in the longing for relationship with his creation of humanity, and is free for us to ignore or to accept. When we accept it through Jesus Christ we are freed from the long term effects of sin. We are re-formed and given new life in Christ.

All glory be to God.