

Sermon Reformation 2019

October 27, 2019

John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. As Jesus speaks those words to those believing in Him, He gives them an identity, doesn't he? And what is that identity? The identity of being His disciples.

As we reflect on the idea of having an identity, we see that this is something that everyone grasps in terms of importance. I've mentioned many times how I love the analogy we can make with the Toy Story movies, how these toys have the name of Andy, the boy who owns them, written on their feet. Of course, I made the connection with baptism, which is why we sang the hymn we just sang. Our baptism gives us identity in Christ. He put His Name on us there.

But the world understands identity too. I was listening to a podcast that was talking about all the distractions we have in the world. This was a secular podcast, but yet there was an understanding that identity means something. The expert speaking had written a book called *Indistractable* and a part of what he said helps in relation to that cause, a part of helping to be indistractable in a world full of distractions, was to claim that identity. He said that as you make something like that a part of your identity, then you live by it. For example, he mentioned the joke, "how do you know when someone's a vegetarian?... Wait and they'll tell you." He said that what that does is it sets something in the mind in terms of saying, "this is who I am," and helps us to live by it, helps us with others to have an accountability to that identity with them, and so helps us to maintain the aspects of that identity we desire.

So what does Jesus do here? Gives the identity of being His disciples. But as we see that, we see that Jesus qualifies this doesn't He? How are they disciples? Look at what He says: **"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."** So how are we disciples? By abiding in His Word. What does that mean? It means know that Word, like I talked about last week. Study that Word for its teaching, its reproof, its correction, and its training in righteousness. Hear that Word preached like I said. And in that, know what it says.

For example, look at this Word in Romans. Look at what the Word says there. **Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that**

every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. What's this say? This says that the Law is sufficient revelation of God's desire for man that no one will be able to justify themselves before God by their works. I often think about this with kids. Those of you who have kids can think of those kids fighting. When they would fight, or if you caught one of them in trouble, what was the response? Always self-justification, right? "But she started it!" "But, I didn't mean to fall off the roof when you told me not to go up there!" "But I wasn't trying to poke Sally in the eye with my pencil when I threw it at her!" Right? There's always that attempt to prove why they didn't do something wrong. And as parents what do you say? You hear the explanation and how do you respond? "Stop it!" Right? "Just stop!" That's what the Law says to us. When your guilty conscience causes you to want to justify yourself, to say your sin's not that bad, the Law says, "Stop it! Just stop!" You have no excuse. That's what this word says. It says no one can earn their way to heaven, that all are without excuse. It says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But then what does it say? But it says that we are **"justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith."** It says that Jesus that Jesus came to redeem sinners. His blood was set forth as a sacrifice for that sin. It's interesting, over the course of my 8 years in the ministry, with some regularity I hear the remark that as Lutherans we talk too much about sin. But you see we have to. This is the root of our problem, of all of our problems. Sin separates us from God, sin causes the pain we experience, sin causes death. And when we see the Word identifying us as sinners, the Christian in us rejoices. Why? Because then we see God's love. Think about it, when you understand how sinful you are, but then you see that Jesus has died for sinners, you can see the depth of that Love that God has for you. You can have security about that love. When you realize the depth of your sin, your identity in Christ is made all the more secure because you don't have to worry about whether you can mess it up, whether it sort of lingers in the balance, and if you say the wrong just the wrong thing, or do just the wrong thing the whole thing will fall apart. No, it's not grounded in you, it's grounded in Him. You see that's faith. You trust in Him, not in yourself, this propitiation of Jesus, to be received by faith.

And to explain that, many of you have likely heard me use the example of a check when it comes to faith, but I don't know that I've used it in a sermon. You see a check works in a similar fashion to faith in Christ. It's because it's a fiduciary arrangement, an arrangement based on good faith, on trust. Think about it this way. If I wrote a check to

each of you for a million dollars, would you deposit it? Some of you are probably thinking, yes! And why? Well for some because something so great in possible value is worth the risk of the fees if the check bounces, right? But even then, there's probably more to it. By that I mean, even if you would deposit it from me because of the risk, you probably wouldn't if it was just a stranger on the street. It makes a difference that it comes from me, your pastor. See, you might be thinking that I am trustworthy as your pastor. It's not generally in the character of a man of God to lie about such a thing, right? To put something out there like that in bad faith. Of course, there are others of you who would say that it's precisely because you know me that you wouldn't deposit the check. Why is that? You know how much I get paid. There's no way I could have 70-80 million dollars in the bank, right?

And there you start to get faith. Faith is grounded in the person who speaks the word to you. Your faith in Jesus is grounded in His person, Who He is, how He is that One Who has proven His authority to live and die for sins. He has proven this by His resurrection. And in that, He has proven His love for you.

And Christians, you see this is what His Word tells you. This is the identity that Word gives you. It gives you the identity of being beloved by God in midst of the greatest depths of your sin. This is the identity qualified by remaining in His Word, as He says this to those believing in Him. But what does He say is the result? **If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.** What's the result? You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Now, to start understanding this result, I think a good place is to frame this a bit differently than how we might hear it. As we hear "knowing the truth," we likely think of an intellectual assent to things that are factual. We likely hear this and think our faith is just about knowing things. Knowing about sin, knowing about God, knowing about Jesus dying for our sins. But first of all knowing in the Biblical sense is not just intellectual assent. It's not just head knowledge. No, it's experiential. How do we know truth by experiencing it? We know it when we know Him. Think about what Jesus says. What does He say about Himself? "I am the Way, and the TRUTH, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me." You see this isn't just knowledge, it's the experience of the person of Jesus, the experience of the person Who is the truth. The One Who comes to you and makes you His own in baptism, who forgives your sin, who feeds you His body and blood. It's this person, here with us in that preaching, in His Holy Supper. That's what the Word tells us, and that's where our identity is found.

And then look at what this knowledge of the truth does. What does it do? It sets you free. Again, we can acknowledge that the intellectual assent to truth sets us free.

There is a freedom in acknowledging what is true, like there's a freedom also, for example, when we have been lying and we come clean. But this identity in Christ is different. What is it? It's the freedom coming from Him. The freedom promised in baptism. Thinking again of our identity in baptism in this, as we sang about it, that's where we see our identity. Baptized into Christ and buried with Him to be raised with Him. That's your identity. Baptized. Resurrected. Resurrected free from the bondage that sin is. Resurrected with the real power to do things pleasing to God. Not of yourself. Of yourself there's still this sinful flesh stuck to you. But in Christ, in the power of His Holy Spirit, there is freedom from sin. There is the promise that you have been raised with Him, and will be finally raised body and soul on the last day. The promise that He has written His Name on you. That's your identity

To close, I think it's worth circling back to our society and it's understanding of the importance of identity. In particular, I say this because there are lies out there about identity. You see the world understands the importance of identity, but not the most valuable part. Think about how we speak of it. How do we identify ourselves today? Lot of emphasis on sex and sexuality, right? We identify as gay vs straight, trans vs cis, non – binary either in sexuality or gender, or outside of sexual identity, we identify by our race. But you see, when you know the truth all of this becomes secondary. When you know Jesus none of this matters. In Him there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. That's what Paul says. Does that mean that male nor female don't matter in this life? That slavery is OK as a choice? That Jew or Greek – that ethnicity or race are of no bearing in this life? No. It means that this is all secondary to Christ. And within Christ life is sacred. Life is sacred as it is to be protected according to the commandments – that's where this ends up mattering. It ends up mattering in how we protect the life of our neighbor no matter their race—that's why we shouldn't be racist. It ends up mattering in how we protect the life of our neighbor in the care of their person and body--that's why we shouldn't be slave owners. Life is sacred in terms of that act which creates life –that's why we honor marriage, not just between man and woman, but the ideal of one man and one woman for their whole life. That's all flowing out of this identity we have in Christ. This identity as disciples. This identity in knowing the truth, the identity we have by abiding in His Word. Christians, that's your identity. The greatest identity of all: baptized in Christ. Beloved by Him, His disciple who knows Him Who is truth. And that Truth has set you free. Amen.