

Reformation Day 2021 – He whom the Son sets free is free indeed!

1. Listening to the words of our Lord in our Gospel lesson today, “the truth will set you free,” we are reminded that the tension between freedom and slavery has a long history in the western world
 - a. There have been many great milestones of freedom in our history
 - i. All the way back to the Magna Carta of 1215 in England that limited the power of the monarchy to the rule of certain laws
 - ii. The Declaration of Independence as the colonies assert their freedom against unjust governance and taxation from England
 - iii. The Emancipation Proclamation in which Lincoln freed the slaves then held in the Confederate States and ended slavery as we knew it here
 - iv. All of these great moments and many others had at least one thing in common: the people who were freed KNEW they were oppressed and cheered their freedom
 - b. But the slavery our Lord is talking about in today’s Gospel doesn’t look anything like slavery as we know it because the ones who are held in bondage don’t know they are slaves
 - i. We’re very good at recognizing tyranny in secular matters (maybe not so good at correcting it speedily but we can see it), but not so the spiritual in fact we’re hard wired to accept the chains of slavery and call them freedom
 - ii. That’s what Paul tells us in Eph 2, **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath.”** (Eph 2:1-3)
 - iii. Someone who is by nature a child of wrath can’t appreciate that bondage because it’s the only reality they know.
 - c. So, when our Lord says in John 8, **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** – you can understand why those gathered around him reacted so negatively.
 - i. Of course, they were thinking of physical slavery, but they weren’t even good at recognizing that, **“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”** (Joh 8:33)
 - ii. Had forgotten Egypt, Babylon, or the current Roman rule?
 - iii. But our Lord wasn’t talking about physical slavery as He continues, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,”**
2. The unfortunate thing for us is that the chains of sin don’t look like chains at all our eyes are blind to our true plight
 - a. In the case of the Jews they didn’t see themselves as sinful, they were God’s chosen people who were following the Law – do this, don’t do that...

- i. Rather than following the Law as an expression of the faith and relying on God's grace for salvation, they had made the Law a means to an end, if we follow the Law we will be saved
 - ii. They were trapped in the same thinking that has marked humankind since the beginning – if I just do enough, if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds I'll earn a place in heaven.
 - b. But Paul tells us in Romans, **“For by works of the law no human being will be justified...since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”** (Rom 3:20)
 - i. The doing of good deeds isn't freedom because no matter how many good deeds you do when held against the standard of the Law you haven't done enough.
 - ii. As an example, in our world, if you live a perfectly law-abiding life up until the time you embezzle a quarter of a million dollars the judge will not let you off because this is your first and only conviction – you're guilty.
 - iii. So it is with God's Law, if you could keep all of the commandments perfectly but break any one of them only once you still broke the Law – through law comes knowledge of sin, the law doesn't help you keep it, it only tells you when you broke it!
 - iv. And as God tells us in His Word, **“The wages of sin is death.”** (Rom 6:23)
 - c. Fast forward 1500 years and in the days of the Reformation the church had taken the place of 1st century Judaism, seeing in the Law a means to salvation
 - i. If you were contrite enough, if the works of satisfaction you did were good enough then maybe... between you and Jesus you'll be saved
 - ii. The Church had been encrusted with 1500 years of tradition that had supplanted the Word of God and the free gift of salvation in Christ
 - d. And God raised up a man like He had done time and again throughout history to call His people back to His Word and salvation
 - i. Convinced that he whom the Son has set free is free indeed Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the castle church door at Wittenberg on Oct 31, 1517 – the Reformation was born.
 - ii. He had rediscovered that the righteous shall live by faith (not works).
- 3. Today society is a bit different than 1st century Palestine or Medieval Europe
 - a. No longer is the Word chained by a few religious zealots who dictate how we should live in order to get to heaven
 - i. Rather, it's ignored by a society that thinks it's Christian because it celebrates Christmas and Easter and doesn't need to be preached to
 - ii. Good Christian, do you have an opinion about how things ought to be in our society? Do you have an opinion about what is true? Kindly keep it to yourself. Who are you to impose your beliefs on us?
 - iii. Today we indulge ourselves in all manner of sin, fleshly, mentally, artistically and we call it freedom

- b. But just because we ignore the Law doesn't mean we are any more free than those who chained themselves to the Law
 - i. Again, from our own laws, just because you ignore the speed limit and drive like it doesn't exist doesn't mean you won't get a ticket when pulled over
 - ii. The only "freedom" we have when we ignore the Law is to exercise more depravity proving that we are children of wrath but the Law still stands.
- c. Beloved in Christ, hear the words of the Gospel as expressed by Paul in our Epistle, **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."** (Rom 3:23-24)
 - i. Do not use your freedom as justification to indulge the flesh as so many in our society do who are enslaved to their passion
 - ii. Through faith in Christ, you are no longer a child of wrath, but you have been made alive with Christ, saved by grace and seated with him in the heavenly places as Paul says – no longer a slave to sin! (Eph 2:5-6)
 - iii. And do not be tempted as so many are to think your right standing with God is a product of your good behavior and therefore you're better than all those living in "sin"
 - iv. There is no more work of salvation to be done, you can't add anything to the gift that you have been given through faith in Christ.
- d. But live in the freedom of the Gospel that because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever, BELIEVES in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.
 - i. When you believe in the Gospel you are made God's instruments to bring the message of salvation to a dying world!
 - ii. We have been called and equipped to share the Good News of salvation, the free gift of God through Christ for all who believe.