

Daily Discipleship

October 31, Reformation Day (B) –John 8:31-36

Living in Christ: *Be Freed*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to be freed in Christ?*

word of life

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36 (NRSV)

Read John 8:31-36

On Reformation Sunday, Lutheran congregations gather in worship and sing Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” The first verse describes God breaking the power of the oppressor’s rod and winning salvation. Because God sent the champion of Jesus to fight, we are set free.

The assigned lectionary on Reformation Sunday is from the Gospel of John. The theme is one of freedom. Jesus knows he brings freedom for those who live in him and stay connected to God’s word. He tells the Jews, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32 NRSV)

1. *What kind of freedom is Jesus describing?*
2. *What does it feel like to be freed by Jesus?*
3. *What does it mean to be “truly his disciple”?*

The Jews who are listening to Jesus are insulted. They are proud of their family heritage to Abraham and his relationship to God. Abraham traveled freely as he followed God to the promised land. Those Jews who are listening to Jesus seem to forget about the years their ancestors spent enslaved in Egypt. This is a critical memory lapse. Every year at Passover, they gather to tell the story of their ancestors crying out to God and God’s response of freedom. Of all people, the Jews should relate to the hardships of slavery and the joy of freedom.

4. *How do you explain the memory lapse on the part of the Jews?*
5. *What kind of freedom are the Jews considering?*

Jesus is talking about the freedom from sin. Not that anyone stops sinning. By nature, humans are sinful and live enslaved to the power of sin. Left to ourselves, we mess things up badly. Even on our best days, we fall short of God’s expectations of us. Falling short includes both things we have actively done and that whole category of things we never get around to doing. Guilt is not a stranger to the Christian. Yet, Jesus sets us free from that guilt.

6. *What healthy role can guilt play in our lives?*
7. *How do we deny the power of sin in our lives?*

In order to claim freedom, one has to be freed from something or someone. The Jews struggle with admitting their own dependency. Their pride blocks them from hearing the words of Jesus and receiving his gift of grace.

8. *What does it feel like to be freed by Christ?*
9. *Imagine this same conversation taking place with freedom-loving USA citizens. Can the message of Jesus be heard by any group who has political freedom? How so?*

word among us

I believe that Jesus Christ – true God, son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary—is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*

Read aloud this section of the *Small Catechism*.

1. *What words or phrases catch your eye?*
2. *What does Luther say we are freed from?*
3. *How does Jesus free us from those things?*

In his younger years, Martin Luther struggled with the power of sin in his personal life. He did not feel worthy to come before God. As a human, he knew he fell short again and again.

4. *What else do you know of Luther's struggles to claim God's grace in his life?*
5. *What does it feel like to be burdened by the power of sin?*
6. *Can you relate to Luther? How so?*

Finally as Luther studied the book of Romans, the message of Jesus reached his troubled heart and spirit. He discovered God's grace. (See Romans 3:19-28.) Ultimately, Luther discovered his salvation was not based on his futile attempts to be right and perfect with God. Instead, salvation is about God and God's gracious love towards humanity as recipients of such a gift. In the case of Luther, God's Word found in Romans set him free.

7. *What are other ways to explain God's grace?*
8. *What makes God's grace so difficult to grasp?*
9. *Why is it so difficult to trust God to be God?*

Like Luther, we are invited to place our trust in God's grace made known in Jesus Christ. That's where true freedom comes. Jesus urges us to stay in God's word, to know the truth, and to be set free. That invitation includes a certain degree of discipline not always associated with freedom. This gift of freedom does not mean doing whatever we want, whenever we want. After Luther discovered the freedom of God's grace, he invested the rest of his life, time and energy sharing that good news with others.

10. *What are we freed to do?*
11. *How is life different now that we have been set free by Jesus?*

Prayer

God of power and might, free us once more from all which enslaves. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3:19-28

last word

Each day this week,
take a few moments
to breathe deeply and
ponder your freedom in Christ.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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