

Sermon: 20th Sunday after Pentecost – Reformation Sunday

Text: John 8:31-36n (v.32)

Theme: The truth will set you free.

Goal: To confirm (or: reaffirm) that we are free children of God through faith in Jesus (as Luther rediscovered it at the Reformation), and no more slaves to sin, to errors and to human exploration.

Dear Friends in Christ:

Introd.: Martin Luther had a big struggle with God in the first years of his life. He wanted to serve God the best he could, but he felt himself bounded to sin, to church's traditions and to laws. He was very afraid of God, and he saw Jesus just as a judge, and not as a Savior. Why? Because he didn't know the TRUTH of the Gospel at that time! He just knew the Law, which condemns! - By God's grace, searching in the Bible, he read the text of Romans 3 (21,22,28): “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, ... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” Some years later Luther confessed that he felt that the gates of the Paradise were open to him when God opened his eyes to the true faith in Jesus!

“The TRUTH will set you free!” Jesus himself is the TRUTH, as he says in John 14:6: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Only Jesus can set us free from the prison of sin and of errors, and to serve God and our neighbor by love! This is one of the great blessings that we have through the Reformation caused by Dr. Martin Luther. By God's grace, he brought the TRUTH to light again, and removed all that was hindering the free way to Jesus.

I – The TRUTH will set you free: from sin!

Sin perturbs everyone every time. People try to remove sin from their lives, to solve the accusation of their consciences, to find a way to be free from sin. This is in the background and in the root of every religion: How can I be free from sin and guilt and please God?

In Luther's time, one of the solution presented by the church to solve that problem was to buy forgiveness of sin on money. The so called "*Letters of Indulgence*" were sold for a lot of money and promised to forgive the sin of the living and of the dead. People were able to buy forgiveness for their past, actual and future sins, and buy forgiveness for the sin even of their deceased forefathers who were in the Purgatory.

With *the 95 Theses against the Indulgence*, Luther said that this was not the way to be freed from sin and eternal death.

Forgiveness is given free by God when you confess your sins and believe that Christ paid for your sins on the cross. This is a matter of God's grace, a matter of faith – and not a matter of commerce and money or deeds.

Many people are trying to get freedom from their sins bargaining with God still nowadays. Or they do some sacrifices in their lives; or they give some money to the church or to some social entities to quiet their consciences; or they try to live a better life... just to justify themselves. These are a kind of actual "indulgences". Everything apart from Jesus that is done to get forgiveness and justification is an offense to what Jesus did on the cross for us. What He did is complete! He said: "It is finished!" He, the TRUTH, is the only one who can set us free from sin! Let us believe only in Him and live as free children of God!

II – The TRUTH will set you free: from error (from false “truths”)

Misunderstanding or misinterpreting the Bible is still a big problem. Every church says it has the truth. But so many mistakes and errors have been taught to people during the history of the church...!

Religious traditions and human rules and laws were a big problem in Jesus' time, in Luther's time and are in our time too. People do not submit themselves only to Jesus and His word; they wanted and want to interpret the Bible according to their own reason and understanding.

We can say that the Bible has a “red wire” from the beginning to the end. If you don't make a link (a relationship) between the Bible stories and Jesus atonement on the cross, then you can find a new doctrine in every page of the Bible. Luther said that *the Bible is like a manger where Jesus is laid. If you don't see Jesus, you have only straw.*

When Jesus said that “you will know the TRUTH and the TRUTH will set you free”, He was telling about Himself, His words, His work. We cannot believe in every preacher, in every book we read, in every news announced through the radio or TV. We have the good example of the Christians in Berea: “They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Act 17:11).

III – The TRUTH will set you free: to serve God and your neighbor

Selfishness is another big problem among the Christians. Selfishness is the opposite of love. The temptation to think only about ourselves and our own needs is around us daily.

The papers of indulgences were exchanged by money, taken from the people based on an anti-biblical strategy. Luther protested against this and focused on and pointed out the correct use of money to serve God and to serve the needy people.

The eyes of a Christian need to be open to opportunities to serve: in the family, at the neighborhood, at the church. I should not spend my money on things which are against God's will.

As free children of God, we know and believe that nothing more can be done by ourselves to get forgiveness of sin, but what Jesus did on the cross. We receive all benefits of His sacrifice by faith. At the same time, we know that we are free children of God to serve Him and to serve our neighbor, according to the Ten Commandments. We are not free to do what we think is the best; but we are free to do what God reveals to us in His Word as the best.

Conclusion: We, as Christian Lutherans, are heirs of Luther's Reformation. We have the blessing to have the Bible and the true doctrine. We have the blessing to have Christ, the TRUTH, and through Him we are on our Way to the Father. What are we doing with these blessings? Let us share our faith and our Lutheran heritage with our friends and relatives. As we read the Bible diary, come to the church to hear the Word and take part in the Sacrament, we are strengthened to live a Christian life according to God's will, with hope and joy, as a free child of our gracious God. Enjoy your freedom in Christ! Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle - Cape Town, 30th October, 2011