

Jesu Juva

“Set Free By the Son”

Text: John 8:31-36; Romans 3:19-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It can be a dangerous thing not to know the situation you're in. For example, if you're in the path of a flood or a tornado and don't know it - *that's a dangerous thing*. If you have cancer growing inside you but don't know it - *that's a dangerous thing*. If you are on a flight with a person who has Ebola but don't know it - *that's a dangerous thing*. To not know these things can be a matter of life and death.

Well that was the situation of the Pharisees in the Holy Gospel that we heard today. And it is, in fact, the situation of many people in our world still today. And this really is a matter of life and death - your eternal life and death. For the Pharisees, as we heard, thought they were free. They told Jesus: ***We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone.*** (I guess those 400 years in Egypt and those 70 years in Babylon really didn't count.) But setting those aside, the Pharisees themselves, in their lifetime, though subject to the occupying Roman authority, weren't slaves. They could come and go as they wanted, and do what they wanted . . . um, mostly.

And many people today believe the same thing. *We are free*. We sing it in our national anthem. We abolished slavery in our country 150 years ago. We work against it around the world. But even more than that, we are not only free in that institutional sense, most would assert that we each personally and individually have *free will*. That we are in control of our lives. We are the masters of our domain. We are enslaved, we are bound, to no one or no thing.

But to think that is a dangerous place to be. For while it's true on a certain level, like: you can freely choose what clothes you're going to wear today, that cereal you're going to eat for breakfast, or what car you're going to buy - you do have free will in all of those things - you do not have free will when it comes to spiritual matters. Not by nature. Not since that day Adam and Eve fell and plunged not only themselves but the whole world into bondage to sin. You're not the exception - as St. Paul said: ***there is no distinction***, there is no difference. There are not some born this way and some born that way. Some born good and some born bad and some born neutral. No, ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** And if that's you, if you sin, Jesus said, you are a slave - ***a slave to sin.*** And that is true whether your name is Abraham or you are a first century Pharisee, a twenty-first century American, or a little sixteenth century monk named Martin.

You see, that's what Luther first realized - *the situation he was in*: that he was a slave to sin. That all those things he was being told to do and told that he should do, and could do, if he just tried hard enough, *he couldn't do*. And the harder he tried, the worse it got. The more he looked at himself, the more he confessed, the more he saw his sin. He couldn't stop it and he couldn't get around it. It was a tornado tossing him about that he couldn't get away from. It was a cancer growing within him that he couldn't cut out. They told him he was free, but he knew the truth was far different than that. He was in bondage, *a slave to sin*.

And so are you. And the person next to you. That's why you sin. You're not a sinner because you do sins, you do sins because you're a sinner. That's why you sin even though you don't want to. You want to do what's right, but don't. You make promises and want to keep them, but then you don't. You lash out and then hate yourself for it. You doubt and worry when you know you shouldn't, you covet and lust, and you have this weird paradox within yourself that those things you're proud of about yourself you know are lies! You want to believe you're a good Christian and you want *others* to think it . . . but you know it's not true. That underneath your proper, button-downed, good looking appearance is a filthy, rotten, putrid, maggot-infested cesspool of a sinner. Yes, you stink. (And yes, the stench wafting forth from the pulpit is pretty bad too.)

Now, it may not be pleasant to know that and acknowledge that, but it is a *dangerous* not to know that. To be so fooled and deceived and blind and so die in your sin . . . physically and spiritually, and so be that slave forever.

And so while it may not be pleasant, it is good to know that, and then to hear this too: **there is freedom for you**. Slavery is your beginning, but it need not be your end. For, St. Paul said, *the righteousness of God* - or, the freedom from sin that God wants for you - *has been manifested* - it happened and is for the whole world - *apart from the law* - apart from what you do or can do - *the righteousness of God* - or again, the freedom of God - *through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*. Or Jesus said it this way: *if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*.

That's what the Reformation was all about. Telling the truth about the situation we are in, and then pointing to the solution. Pointing you not to yourself and your efforts and your doing, but pointing you outside of yourself, away from yourself, to Jesus. For if you are to be free, He's the only one who can set you free. Free from slavery to sin, free from fear of death, free from the bond of the grave, free from the oppression of the devil, free to live as the child of God you are. For *if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*.

And so the Reformation was not about doing, but receiving - receiving this work of Jesus as a gift. That here it is, for you!

Baptism is *the Son setting you free*, washing you clean from your sin, breaking those bonds you were born with, and raising you in Jesus' resurrection to a new life. Here it is, for you!

Absolution is *the Son setting you free*, proclaiming and promising to you the forgiveness Jesus earned for you in His death and resurrection and beating back the enemy seeking to enslave you again. Here it is, for you!

The Gospel is *the Son setting you free* - all those stories you hear in Scripture, they're about you! You the leper who is cleansed, you the blind who can see, you the deaf who can hear, you the dead who is raised. Here it is, for you!

And **the Supper** is *the Son setting you free*, feeding you with the medicine of immortality, the Body and Blood that died and rose and cannot die again, given to you, that though you die, you too live forever. Here it is, for you! Here is Jesus, for you. Here is life and freedom for you. Here, for you. Here!

That's what the Reformation was about. And so the **baptismal liturgy** proclaimed that again and all that had been added to it over the years that obscured what was really happening was stripped away.

The **Absolution** was again joyously announced as the good news it is and all talk of merits and satisfactions and your having to do it exactly the right way or it wouldn't work or wouldn't work as well as it should, silenced.

The **Gospel** was preached - Jesus was preached, not saints; and not as example, but as Saviour.

And the **Supper** was given to sinners. Yes, to sinners! You didn't have to make yourself worthy to receive it - *it* made you worthy, for here is the forgiveness and life you need. Take and eat and drink. It is for you.

These gifts. For you. And they're still for you. Unworthy you. Sinner you. Whatever you've done. It's really that simple.

But it's also that important. For now as always, the devil is constantly tempting us to believe that religion is about what we do. That yes, Jesus died for you, but that's in the past - what matters *now* is what you do. That you change, that you be better, that you be the Christian God wants you to be. Because if the devil can get you to focus on that, on yourself and what you do, then he's well on the way to driving you away from your past-tense-Jesus -either in despair, that you will never measure up and do it and so you just give up, or in pride, thinking that you have done it and don't really need Jesus anymore!

Don't fall for it. Know the situation you're in. Yes you are a sinner, but you have a Saviour. That's such a simple message, isn't it? Yet we keep messing it up! Thinking there must be something more to it. It can't be that easy, or that good.

Well, it *wasn't* easy - it took a cross and death! But it is good - for all God does is good. And perfect. And for you. He's not doing all this for Himself. He doesn't need it. He's doing it for you, because you do. You need His love, you need His gift, you need Him. And here He is, for you.

Now that will have an effect on your life and how you live and what you do and what's important to you and what you invest your time and energy in. But not because it's what you're doing - that you are changing, that you are doing better, that you're being the Christian God wants you to be! But because Jesus and His forgiveness and His life are living in you (Galatians 2). Because you've been set free from that old, horrible master of sin, and now live under a new, better, good, and loving master - *a saving one*. And how can that not change things? Change *everything*? And everything in your life? Indeed it does.

And that little sixteenth century monk just wanted everyone to know that. That freedom, that life, that love, that gift. He didn't try to start a movement, never wanted a church named after him, and didn't really think of himself as anything other than a beggar before God with everyone else. He just preached the forgiveness of Jesus. But it's that forgiveness that makes all the difference in the world. It started a Reformation. Not just one that happened some 500 years ago . . . but a Reformation *every* time that message is proclaimed. Starting from when Adam and Eve heard it, to when Jesus did it, to the Absolution, Gospel, and Supper today. That forgiveness changes things. For that Word is strong and powerful, still today making sinful beggars like you and me children of God.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.