

John 8:31-36

The Truth that Sets You Free

In our gospel for this day, Jesus was speaking to Jews who had come to believe in Him. When Jesus told them that truth would make them free, they responded that they had never been slaves to anyone. That is not exactly true. As a people of God, they were slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. There was the Assyrian and Babylonian exile. And in Jesus' day they lived under Roman Rule. Though not exactly slaves, they were not exactly free either. The Romans had placed limits on their freedom. But still, these Jews liked to think they were free and not slaves.

Jesus told these Jews who believed in Him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and truth will make you free." The slavery that Jesus was talking about did not involve human masters. Their master was their own sin.

There could have been one of these Jews who believed in Jesus named Simon. Simon would be considered a self-made man. He built up his business from scratch. And he had invested a lot of time working at it. Simon had much to be proud of. It was now profitable, but still required a lot of work. He still spent hours and hours each day trying to improve it and keep it going. He spent so much time working at it that it cut into his family time and his faith life at the synagogue. Some felt that the business had become his master and he was a slave to it. But Simon's answer was, "I enjoy it." He also loved seeing the cash return.

Simon could not see the truth about his business. He denied this truth and so Jesus' words seemed absurd to him. He would have answered along with the others, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone."

Suzanna may have been one of the believing Jews who heard Jesus speak that day. Suzanna was one of those persons who had to be right all the time. She thought it unthinkable that she would make a mistake. One day she bought a belt at the market and was convinced that this belt had a defect a month later. She tried to return the belt and get her money back, but the market manager said we do not carry that type of belt. Suzanna insisted she had purchased it there and would not give an inch. The manager finally gave in to resolve the situation. Then in the next week Suzanna found in the closet the new belt. She had been confused and returned a belt she had for several years. She was wrong, but she just shrugged her shoulders and said it was the salesperson who made her nervous. After all, she could not imagine ever being wrong.

Suzanna could not see the truth about herself. She had become a slave. Her rightness had become her master so that she could no longer see her faults and errors and sin. In denying this truth she would have responded with the others, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone."

Ruben was another Jew who had heard Jesus' words that day and they seemed absurd to Him. Ruben had a hot temper. He was always saying things and doing things that got him in a lot of trouble. A child would cut through the yard and he would lash out at the child. He was always in conflict with the neighbors over one thing or another. His wife knew that if something was not done soon Ruben would end up in prison. Ruben continued to deny he had a temper problem. He could not see the truth about

His anger. He had become a slave and anger was his master. He denied the truth and he answered along with everyone else, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone."

We too could have been part of that crowd that heard Jesus' words. Though the master of sin would be different in each of us, gossip, love of money, too much debt, etc. Though they do not look like slavery to us, maybe a weakness, or quirky personality trait, Jesus says, "Very truly I tell everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

Martin Luther knew the truth about himself full well. When Luther was in the monastery, he tried to escape this slavery to sin. He spent hours and hours in confession and trying to perfect his life to please God. Still Luther found himself coming up short in God's eyes. With came the nagging guilty conscience. Later Luther discovered the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the encouragement of his confessor to become a teacher of the Bible at the University in Whittenburg, Germany. In his studies he discovered that the righteous live by faith. And in Romans that we are made right with God through His grace by trusting in His promise.

During this time John Tetzel was going about the German territory selling Indulgence, with his famous sales pitch, "A penny makes the coffer ring, a soul from purgatory springs. In purchasing these slips of paper, the people could get time off in purgatory. Luther saw this as absurd. This led to the posting of the 95 theses on the church door in Whittenburg.

When was in the Wartburg castle in exile following his "Here I stand speech." in a sense It looked like he was imprisoned and working like a slave translating the NT into German, but he felt more free than he ever had. In his studies and His work, he understood that while God expects righteousness and perfection, God gives it to us even though we are imperfect. Jesus speaks of this freedom like this. "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." The Son not only tells us we are free, He makes us free. Does it through His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection. He takes our sins on Himself and gives all believers His life and righteousness. This all done for you and me by God's grace. You do not need to earn God's favor. Jesus has done it for you

Had not Jesus come, had He not died and risen from the dead, we would still be slaves to sin. There would be no escape. But Jesus did make us free.

We all have known slavery to sin and its guilt. But thanks to be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ who makes us free.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard your hearts and in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.