

John 8:31-36

“Set Free”

Reformation Day (Observed)

October 26, 2025

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said to the Jews who had believe in Him, ***“If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:31-32).

Today, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church observes Reformation Day. We set today apart, or in particular October 31, as we remember how the triune God inspired an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther to bring His Church back to its roots, the source – the very Word of God in teaching the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ so that we would be set free from sin, death and the devil.

But prior to the Lutheran Reformation, most people had no clue that anything was wrong with the Church. The people just did as the Church told them. Normally, this kind of faith would be admired, but not when the Church is corrupt. You see, at this time, the Roman Church had become hopelessly corrupt. It was so corrupt spiritually as hardly anyone was being taught or could even recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer and yet, the Roman Church still called them Christians. They didn’t know the basics of the faith. On top of this, the Roman Church was fiscally corrupt as it funded the construction of the new Basilica of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome through indulgences, which through the pope’s authority would “supposedly” shorten temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins.

There were so many problems. The Roman Church was certainly corrupt. And the people were enslaved to this corruption.

The people back then likely did not hear much about today’s text but they surely knew of the Church’s traditions.

Now, in today’s text, Jesus is addressing those who believe, and yet, they do not believe. To be sure, Jesus is speaking today to people who were willing to listen to Him, but they did not quite trust Him. You could say, they had a belief in Jesus that was superficial.

We hear about this elsewhere in the Gospels, of those many who desired to crown Jesus as their king, but very shortly, they just walked away. We hear about this vividly in the Parable of the Sower. There, Jesus described those on the rocky soil as those who, ***“when they hear the Word, [they] receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away”*** (Luke 8:13).

There is certainly some faith there, but it was superficial, so when any stress comes upon them from the world, they walk away. This was the fact of many who could confess Jesus as their Lord privately, but they wouldn't dare confess Jesus as Lord publicly out of fear of being put out of the synagogue (John 9:22).

So, why the fear? Well, it's because they needed to be set free!

The problem is that the hearers don't realize that they need to be set free. They think everything is just hunky dory.

So, Jesus says to them: ***“If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:31-32). To this, the hearers respond: ***“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”*** (John 8:33).

Apparently, these Jews needed a lesson in their own history as a people. They have been enslaved by so many civilizations: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Syria. Even at that present time, they were subjects of Rome. So, from all outward appearances, they were *far* from being free. In fact, one of the ideas for the promised Messiah was to be a mighty warrior so the Jews would have control of their land. So, this idea that the Jewish people were never enslaved was very far-fetched.

Plus, just a relationship to Abraham will not save anyone. Abraham was saved by His faith in the one true God. He wasn't saved by his blood type or by who he knew. He was saved purely by God's grace through His faith in Him.

But Jesus goes deeper than just outward appearances. Jesus is never just at surface level. Jesus is never satisfied with just talking about the symptoms. You see, Jesus always gets to the root causes. He gets to the problem.

Jesus says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the Son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”*** (John 8:34-36).

All people need to be set free from slavery. And this slavery is the bondage to sin. Just before today's text, Jesus said: ***"I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins"*** (John 8:24). Jesus followed this up with: ***"Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin"*** (John 8:34).

Like the Jews then, we too, often believe that we are not enslaved. And what does it mean to be enslaved? Well, to be a slave is to be totally under the control of another and is not able to free oneself. Sin is akin to an addiction. We sin and keep on sinning. Sin entices us. It's that forbidden fruit that feels so good to bite, but it leaves us with nothing. Sin causes us to lust at others who are not your spouse, but ends up with committing adultery with them in your heart. Sin causes us to lose our tempers; to hold grudges; to harbor resentment. Sin causes us to gossip and listen to rumors; to take pleasure in talking about the faults of your neighbor.

Today's world does not like to admit that it is enslaved. Even, we Christians, God's own dear children, can find ourselves living and acting as though we were still in chains – not free to be for God or for others what He has set us free to be.

So, what is going on here? What is this slavery?

Well, it's a slavery of the ears. It is caused by listening. But listening to the wrong voices and to the wrong message. The Jews back then were listening to anything, anything other than Jesus' own words. Jesus said, ***"Abide in My Word,"*** but they would have none of that. They didn't want to accept *all* of His teaching and remain faithful to His Word. No way!

But it is Christ's Word that sets us free! He sets us free from the slavery to other voices, so that we can listen to Him!

Earlier in John 8, the Pharisees asked Jesus: ***"Who are you?"*** (John 8:25). Who is this Jesus? ***"Before Abraham was, I am,"*** He says (John 8:58). Jesus is the perfect Son of the Father, from eternity, fully and completely God and man.

As the perfect Son, Jesus obeys the Father. He carries out the Father's will as no one else ever had, and as no one ever could. He completes the work. He even puts the stamp on completion by saying: ***"It is finished"*** (John 19:30).

The only way for sinners to be released from our bondage to sin and its penalty, which is eternal death, is to be united by faith in Jesus Christ, who in His death and bodily resurrection provides deliverance. Christ died so that we would live and live forever by faith in Him!

Having died to sin in Christ, sin is no longer our master. Instead, we become free to be servants of God and of His righteousness. So, listen to the voice of Jesus and be set free!

Back then, the Jews just would not listen. They stopped their ears. For you and me, on this Reformation Day, listen to Jesus' voice and be set free from slavery to sin.

Jesus, who is Truth incarnate, set us free as He willingly laid down His life for you and me. Upon His crucifixion on the cross, Jesus set us free from our slavery to sin, so that we could live forever by repentance and faith in Him!

Despite our filthy sin, Jesus is greater than all sin. He died for you. He rose for you. He ascended for you. He declares that you are His. He died, so that all who cling to Him would live forever!

Jesus died and rose, so that we can always turn to Him in our times of need: when we lust, lose our tempers, hold grudges, gossip, or any other kind of sin. So, when the fallen world, our sinful nature, and the devil tell us to pursue sin that flows from our desires, listen to Jesus. Turn from that sin and turn to Him.

Jesus says you belong to Him. And since you belong to Him, He promises to always protect you, so that you are free to serve Him.

Here in the Divine Service, Jesus declares us free as He releases us from slavery to sin. Here, we listen to Jesus' liberating words of our absolution. Here is where yours and my faith is strengthened through Christ's body and blood given to us which forgives our sins as He leads us to resist slavery to sin.

Jesus has set us free! Through His death, we are free from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. Through His death, He declared us sons and daughters of God! So, let us abide in His Word! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +