

The title for today's message is: **Let His Freedom Ring**

Jesus said: **If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Happy Reformation Day. Today is an important day and a perfect day to talk about Freedom.

But the sad truth is, in this country of ours, and in many others, there are people who are free when it comes to their state, but slaves when it comes to their souls.

Our lessons today tells us about the most important freedom; spiritual freedom.

My prayer for all of us this Reformation Sunday is simply that God's Word would touch our hearts, and that we would leave here with a deeper appreciation for the joy of being free in Christ.

This is precisely the kind of freedom Christ himself talks about in our reading from John.

Here we meet up with Jesus as he is surrounded by a large group of people who are challenging his authority. These people were slaves.

They were slaves not only to the Roman authorities, but more importantly, they were slaves to their sin, to their traditions, and to their empty self righteousness.

In our reading, we hear Jesus give these spiritual slaves the key to loosen the chains that bind them

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

This was the simple truth, but the trouble is, it was too simple. That's right, It was too much for these Pharisees, these big-shots in the Jewish faith.

They couldn't accept that Jesus was the answer; that Jesus was the way the truth and the life.

It was too much for them to admit that they; the crowd; the self-righteous; the pure blooded Jews; were not themselves, the answer.

Their response to Jesus was one rooted in denial. They answered Jesus, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.

How can you say that we shall be set free?" If it weren't so sad, it would be funny. Here the Jews are denying they have ever been slaves.

They denied the reality of the Roman oppression. They denied the very history of their people who had been slaves in Egypt and Babylonia.

But most of all, they denied their own slavery to sin. They blindly tried to believe that their own choices, their own actions, their own merit could save them.

They were in denial because the truth hurts. Yes, it is Good News that were truly free through the cross of Christ.

But, in order to reach that Good News, we have to accept the reality, that without the cross, we would be truly bound, truly condemned, truly hopeless.

The truth requires us to venture into a very dark place. Ironically, this is a day that we thank our Lord, celebrate, and sing His praises.

Because the Holy Spirit led one man into this dark valley, into this tunnel of chaos, into this pit of despair.

Martin Luther, the brave, confident, vibrant leader of faith; a man who is considered to be one of the most influential people in history.

He was a man who God used to change our understanding of God's Word, who pursued the truth, who renewed the proclamation of the gospel by way of fear.

Now, Martin Luther, like the Pharisees from our reading, did all the right things.

That's right, he devoted himself to the study of God's Work, he took monastic orders and became a model monk.

He made trips to adore the holy relics, he confessed his sins with forthrightness and a burning passion.

By human standards, he had earned every right to feel secure, to feel free, maybe even to be a little smug.

The church at the time even told him so. They freely pointed him to all the rules he followed, they lauded him for the life he chose.

They even told him to find peace because of who he was and what he did. Martin Luther should have been relaxed, and very comfortable with himself.

But he wasn't. In all these things that he did, Luther realized he was not free. In fact, he was as bound, as hopeless, and as despairing as he ever was.

He tried even harder; he fell even shorter. There would never be enough holy relics to see to ease his heart.

His vows would never be kept perfectly enough to rest his soul. There would never be enough study to ease his worry.

He could never deny himself enough pleasures to cleanse his body. There would never be enough time to confess all his sins.

Taught to rely on his own works for his freedom; he found it was never enough.

His sin was like quicksand; the harder he fought with his own strength, the deeper he sank.

The more he tried to rely on himself, the tighter he could feel Satan's spiny grip on his soul.

Luther was tortured by his own conscience, paralyzed by his own sins. Luther found himself in the predicament all people eventually find themselves.

That is when forced to confront the reality of God's Holiness, and the reality of our own frailty.

We all have to face the truth, the truth unsheathed, the truth made plain, the truth unavoidable. Look God has standards we cannot attain.

God has rules we cannot follow and God has demands we cannot meet. I am so incredibly thankful that God led Martin Luther here.

Because here, in this desperate position, the Holy Spirit led Luther to seek the truth, the plain truth of God's Word.

God gave Luther the courage to look past the man-made rules, the invented human tradition, the flawed teachings of much of the church to see what God really had to say to sinners in His Word.

In the Bible, Luther sought and found the truth, the truth about a different kind of righteousness.

A righteousness that comes not from us, from doing the right things, or from being the right kind of person.

But a righteousness that comes from faith, that comes through Christ, that comes through Jesus suffering and death on the cross.

Now, Martin Luther was no longer a slave to sin as a result of this newly found understanding of true righteousness.

And in his newfound freedom, Luther also found a mission to tell the world the truth, the truth of God's Word.

He had a newfound love and appreciation of Scripture. In his book "The freedom of a Christian." Luther writes.

There is no more terrible a disaster with which the wrath of God can afflict men than a famine of the hearing of His Word.

Now the great news for today is that this same freedom that sent Martin Luther's soul soaring is the same freedom we have in the Gospel here today.

It is a message that is still alive, that is still relevant, that we still need to hear week after week, day after day, hour after hour.

Satan is still as hard at work as he ever has been. Satan is still trying to grab our ankles and pull us into the quicksand of self-righteousness, societal expectations and self-reliance.

We have been freed from Satan's hellish shackles, and yet, unwittingly, and unknowingly, we try to reach down and to fasten them on once again.

Too often we look to our own righteousness and are satisfied to trade truth for shallow denial. We lean on ourselves instead of the truth.

It is too easy to pat ourselves on the back for all the great things we've done. To shower praises on us and those like us.

To hold so fast to our own deeds that we look down upon others who don't act like us, who we don't think are as good as us.

All the while we play the fool, reaching out to grasp the fleeting mist of our own works, and neglect the solid strong substance of the cross.

Because of all this we should fall deeper and deeper into despair. So today my friends, as everyday, we have a reason to celebrate.

We should celebrate the truth that we are indeed free. Free by Christ Jesus, free through Christ Jesus, and free in Christ Jesus.

The same rays of the Gospel light that shone on Martin Luther's troubled faith are the same rays of hope and life that warms our hearts and souls today.

We are lifted out of the pit, we are rescued from the fires of hell, we are released from the chains of darkness all because we have been made new in Christ.

Yes, Christ has made us new. Christ has made us worthy, and Christ has made us all free. So again, if the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed!

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.