

John 8:31–36: ³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Truth and Freedom

INTRODUCTION

Who here values the truth? Even if you don’t like it when someone tells you the truth, do you still value the truth? Do you like to go around with food stuck in your teeth or your fly open , or do you want someone to tell you, even if you’re a little embarrassed by it? Lately, especially during this election cycle, I’m sure that many of you have an even greater appreciation for the truth because you haven’t heard much of it from the presidential candidates, the mainstream media, Hollywood, or television news.

As sinners, though, none of us really likes the truth—especially the truth on the spiritual level. Many of the Old Testament prophets were maligned and even killed because they spoke the truth. People leave their church because they don’t want to hear the truth. People even change doctors because they don’t want to hear the truth.

And one thing we do well is insulate ourselves from the truth. That’s pretty much the goal of political correctness: silence truth speakers so that no one’s feelings get hurt—so that people don’t have to listen to something that offends them, or be subjected to an opinion they don’t agree with. Welcome to the new definition of tolerance. Tolerance used to mean, in essence, to agree to disagree—“I may not like your opinion, but I will tolerate it, anyway.” But now

tolerance means to have complete affirmation of anyone's lifestyle or life-choices. And if you don't agree with someone's way of life—no matter how hurtful it is—you're intolerant. And in this brave new world of tolerance, it's okay to be intolerant toward someone society considers to be a hateful bigot.

Thus, the new tolerance insulates people from the truth. This new tolerance has led to something called safe spaces on college campuses. These are places where college students can insulate themselves from hearing things they don't want to hear. Inside of these areas, you're not allowed to express an opinion that might offend someone else. The New York Times describes safe spaces this way: "Safe spaces are an expression of the conviction, increasingly prevalent among college students, that their schools should keep them from being 'bombarded' by discomfiting or distressing viewpoints. Think of the safe space as the live-action version of the better-known trigger warning, a notice put on top of a syllabus or an assigned reading to alert students to the presence of potentially disturbing material" (March 21, 2015).

Far from being a safe space, the thing about closing our ears to the truth is that we're open to all kinds of lies—and lies have one source: the devil, the father of lies—and one goal, to destroy. And lies—especially lies about what is sinful and what isn't—don't free people—they bind them—they bind them to sin—both its temporal and eternal consequences—and to God's wrath, and to condemnation.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is trying to free the Jews from the lies they have been taught and believe. These Jews believed they were on good standing with God because they were descendants of Abraham. When Jesus tried to tell them that by abiding in His Word they will know the Truth and the Truth will set them free from sin and death, their response was, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You

will become free’?” That’s a rather ironic statement that shows how their consciences were bound by their lies because the Jews weren’t free—they were under the heavy thumb of the Roman Empire. And not only were they politically enslaved to the Romans, they were spiritually enslaved to sin. Even though they were descendants of Abraham, they were also descendants of Adam—they were sinners. As sinners, they were slaves to sin and death—and nothing could free them from this slavery—not their ancestry, not their works, not their religion—only Jesus, the Son of God, could free them from sin, death and God’s judgment.

So, speaking the truth, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” A slave couldn’t free himself, but if Jesus, the Son of God, sets you free, you will be free indeed.

But Jesus had invaded their safe space with His divine truth—and they weren’t happy about it. In the very next verses, Jesus will declare: “I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

And that’s just what they did. They had the Roman government nail Jesus to a cross and kill Him. With His burial they thought the truth was buried with Him. But Jesus rose from the dead because He is who He said He is—the Son of God. He—and He alone—has the power to free sinners from sin by His life, death and resurrection.

And because Jesus is God’s Son—the Second Person of the Holy Trinitarian Godhead—if He sets you free, you are free indeed.

On this Reformation Sunday, we don’t celebrate Luther. We thank God for Martin Luther courageous stand for the truth. Today, and everyday, we rejoice in the Truth that sets us free

from sin and death and God's wrath. That Truth is more than a Word, it's a person. Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. Jesus is the Truth, whose life, death and resurrection set you free from Satan's lies, sin and death.

All of Holy Scripture proclaims God's redemptive work in Christ Jesus. But mere knowledge of Jesus and His work isn't sufficient for salvation. The Jews knew who Jesus was. The demons knew who Jesus was—but they didn't believe. The "knowing" that Jesus talks about is the knowing of faith—to know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has set you free from sin and death through His forgiveness and life. The Apostle Paul reiterates this knowing and believing in the first chapter of Ephesians: "In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

This faith in Christ through which you believe and are justified before God comes to you as a gift of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God—the Word of God pronounced over you in Holy Baptism, declared to you in absolution, proclaimed to you in preaching, and given into your very mouths in the Sacrament of the Altar. But it is all the Word of God! That's why we Lutherans hold the Word of God with the highest regard and honor—and rightly divide it into Law and Gospel. Because knowledge of sin and knowledge of Christ and His salvation come to us through the divinely inspired writers of God's precious and holy Word.

As Reformation Christians, you know that God's Word is true—inspired by the Holy Spirit, centered on Christ, and alone is able to make you wise unto salvation. But knowing and believing the Truth that sets you free carries a great burden because God is all about saving sinners from sin. So, there's no safe space for sin in God's Word. The writer to the Hebrews

says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

The world loves its lies—the last thing this culture wants is a Word of truth that cuts to the core and exposes every lie. That means that those who stand on the Word of God are not safe in the world. So, the challenge for faithful, reformation Christians is to remain faithful—to remain in the Truth that sets you free.

So, I want you to remember this: When you are challenged in this world of sin to be unfaithful, you are safe in God’s kingdom—safe in Christ, safe in His forgiveness, safe in your Baptism, safe in God’s earthly domain—the Church. And not only are you safe, you are free, free in Christ from sin and death and God’s wrath.

And remember this: Unbelievers are blinded by Satan and slaves of sin. They see the Word of God as something that inhibits their freedom and something that hurts. And they see those who bear the Truth as bigoted and intolerant.

But they are not the enemy—the devil is. He has blinded them to the Word that has come to set them free. The Truth—that is Christ—has been given to the Church and to every Christian to live and proclaim. As those who by God’s grace know and believe in the Way and Truth and the Life, you are called and equipped to be faithful in that Word—not only for your own sake, but for the sake of your neighbor. At the risk of being called intolerant, God’s people must be faithful. But not just in the Gospel—that God is a God of grace and forgiveness; but also in the Law—that God is a God of morality and righteousness. For the lie of “tolerance” continues to bind people to their sins and wreak havoc on human life.

And one final thing to remember: You are not alone in this task—you are part of God’s

family. And Jesus promises to give you spiritual strength for this task—and to be with you always, to the end of the age.

Conclusion

Colleges have their safe spaces to protect students from hearing things they don't want to hear, where they think they are safe from the opinions of others. But so long as they protect themselves from the truth, they aren't free—eventually the lies will catch up with them and destroy them. They need Jesus—the only truly safe space the world has ever known.

Because you have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, you know and believe in the Truth that sets you free. And because you have Christ, you value the truth, even when it hurts, because you know that sometimes God has to root the sinner out of his or her safe space of sin with His Word of Law, so He can give you The Truth that sets you free.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.