

Reformation - observed (10/25/09 – *True Freedom ... in Christ Alone*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The words of our Savior *to the Jews who had believed in Him* [JN 8.31] apply to us. *If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*, says our Lord [8.31–32]. And the truth of the matter is that this abiding in – this remaining in ... living and existing and dwelling in – the Word of our Lord is not nearly as easy as we would like it to be ... from our side. In fact, it is one of those “camel through the eye of a needle” sorts of things [MK 10.25]. It is **impossible** for us if we try to do it ourselves. It is only possible **for God** – Who mercifully and graciously works in our lives through Word and Sacrament to keep us abiding in His Word and in Him.

Abiding in the Word and work of Christ is a real problem for us because our flesh is constantly striving **against** Christ’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit through that Word in our lives. And because our flesh works so hard against the things of God – against His Word ... against His Spirit ... against His grace and forgiveness in Christ – because our flesh constantly works so hard against the things of God, we keep finding ourselves enslaved in our sins. Sometimes we struggle against the same sin over and over again. Sometimes we almost run from one sin to another. Whichever situation you find yourself in today, the result is the same: you and I (and everyone else in this world) keep finding ourselves enslaved to sin. But, just like the Jews to whom our Lord spoke, our flesh doesn’t get this reality – and so our flesh rebels against the thought of needing to be set free. Their words (only very slightly paraphrased) could be our own: *We are offspring of Luther and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, “You will become free”?* [JN 8.33] And Christ’s response applies to us today just as much as it did to those Jews back then: *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin* [8.34]. Do you commit sin? Remember the words from John that we use in *Divine Service Setting 2: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* [1JN 1.8]. You commit sin; therefore, you are a slave to sin. It’s that simple.

Our problem, in part, is that we are surrounded by so much sin – vividly

portrayed before us in the news ... in advertisements ... and in some of our favorite television programs – that we often become desensitized. We easily miss our sins. The world – with its corruption – has so infiltrated our thinking and doing that we don't even recognize our sin. Then our proud flesh begins to compare itself to others and becomes prouder still – and begins to rely on its laurels. *I've been a Lutheran ... a Christian ... all my life. I'm not a slave to sin.* Or, equally condemning: *Well, at least I'm better than most of the people around here.* We take the life God has given us for granted – because our society has so depreciated life both at its beginning and at its end ... so the middle goes that way as well. We don't see our sins of disdain for parents and authority – the world has sucked us into its disdain for any authority at all. This disregard goes for authority in the Church as well ... even for the Head of the Church, Christ Himself. When God doesn't immediately crush us for our sins ... when He allows sin to go on around us, our flesh takes it as license to go ahead and sin.

And all the time, our flesh would boast in itself ... while at the same time neglecting – even despising – God's Holy Word. We often don't even try to abide in the Word of Christ – and are content not to do so.

The danger in this is, of course, the warning of our Lord ***to the Jews who had believed in Him: The slave does not remain in the house forever.*** When we allow the members of our flesh to commit sin – even dwell and abide in sin – we are slaves to sin ... and will not remain in the house of our Lord very much longer.

What's the solution? What we need is to be reformed and transformed from slaves to sons. There is, literally, nothing we can do to make ourselves abide in the Word and house of God. No work we can do – that was part of the point of the Reformation ... the proclamation of the Gospel-Word that declares our works to be useless in our justification ... and Christ's work to be everything. As our *Epistle* from ROMANS 3 says: ***For by works of the Law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin.*** [3.20] But ... ***if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*** [JN 8.36]. **That** is freedom – ***True Freedom ... in Christ Alone!***

And that is, actually, the ***eternal Gospel*** spoken of in our first *Lesson*

[REV 14.6] for this *Festival of the Reformation*. It is eternal Good News for all mankind ... the blessed message of universal grace for each and every sinner – which is to say, for all people ... including us! That’s what St. Paul is talking about in our *Epistle* when he says by inspiration: *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ... and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* [ROM 3.23–24]. **All** have sinned and are by nature slaves to sin. But, likewise – and by this God “trumps” all our sin ... and frees us from it – **all** have been justified ... redeemed by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who shed His holy, precious Blood to atone for our sins and the sins of the whole world. And that redemption – that justification – is applied to us personally by God’s grace through faith. That’s what the Holy Scriptures teach from beginning to end. That’s the core of the Reformation. That’s what we celebrate on *Reformation Day: Scripture Alone ... Grace Alone ... Faith Alone ... Christ Alone*. We can – and do – obtain *True Freedom ... in Christ Alone!*

The perennial Good News for us is that the Son has set us free – free from sin ... free from the guilt and eternal consequences of sin ... free from the enslaving stronghold of the devil ... free from death ... free from the fires of hell. Christ has done it by taking into Himself our weak human flesh that is so easily entangled by and enslaved to sin – yet He was fully human **without** sin. He was **never** – even for a moment – a slave to sin. He never committed sin – not a single one! Christ subjected Himself to the Law – over which He is Lord – for **our** sake ... for me and **for you**. And in placing Himself under the Law, He has fulfilled the Law – every last jot and dot – **for you**. In short, Christ fulfilled all righteousness and has become **for you** the righteousness of God. And through the Gospel – through Word and Sacrament ... through Baptism and Absolution and Preaching and the Holy Supper – Christ offers and gives **to you** all the blessed benefits of **His** righteousness ... so that **you** are justified, **you** are declared righteous in the sight of God for Jesus’ sake. **You are free indeed!**

As ROMANS 8.2 puts it: *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*. In Christ – by God’s grace through Spirit-given faith in Jesus – you have been set free from the

condemning Law that accuses you of sin and declares you to be deserving of death for your sin. You are free from the accusation and condemnation of the Law! You have life – true life – by and in the Lord and Giver of Life! So ... you are no longer slaves to sin. St. Paul sums up the thought and contrast very nicely in ROMANS 6: ***But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.... For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*** [ROM 6.17–22] That’s a good kind of bondage ... a blessed slavery – to be bondservants and slaves of the living and ever-forgiving Lord!

In Christ – by His sinless, righteous work on the Cross – you are no longer slaves to sin, but, rather, sons and daughters ... children. And ***if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*** [ROM 8.17]. Thus, you **will** live ... you **will** exist ... you **will** continue ... you **will** remain ... you **will** abide ... and you **will dwell in the House of the LORD forever** [PSA 23.6; JN 8.35] – by God’s gracious, continued work in your life. And **that** is how you **abide** in the Word of our Lord and are thus truly His disciples. **Not** by **your** striving – that’s like the camel going through the eye of the needle ... that’s impossible. As our Lord says: ***With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.*** [MK 10.27]. You **will abide** in Christ’s Word and forever be His disciples because **Christ Himself** has done and will continue to do what is impossible for you and in you. That’s Reformation ... true Reformation ... by the grace of God ... working by means of the eternal Gospel. That’s freedom ... ***True Freedom ... in Christ Alone!***

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]