

Free Indeed

October 25, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This morning we're celebrating the Reformation (as well as confirmation). It was at the end of October in 1517, that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. This was the beginning of the Reformation in the church, and yet at that time, Luther had no idea what was about to happen. All he really wanted to do was to have a scholarly debate on whether or not the church should be selling indulgences – pieces of paper that were being sold by the Roman Catholic church that said that someone could get into heaven. The church was doing so to raise money for the building of St. Peter's cathedral in Rome. But little did Luther and his followers know, that some 503 years later, because of the Reformation, God would work through these events to bring us back once again to the Word and the truth that sets us free. Because through it all, we've come to realize that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, which trusts in The Word alone.

There's a story of a park ranger who got caught out in a blizzard, high in the Rocky Mountains. As he was making his way to safety, he became disoriented and lost. It took him quite a while, but eventually, he could make out a cabin in the distance and found himself crawling his way past its doorway. Once inside, having been overcome by exhaustion and still quite disoriented, he didn't even bother to light a fire or take off his wet clothing. Instead, he simply laid on the floor and began to sink into oblivion. He would've stayed there and died, but someone thought to look for him in the cabin, and finding him, woke him from a seemingly catatonic state. After he was rescued, he

shared with others that he just didn't realize how dangerous his situation was at the time. Because, as he said, *"When you're freezing to death, you actually feel warm all over, and don't want to wake up because it feels too good."*

Today, it occurs to me that there are many who might be in a similar *spiritual* state of mind. Not realizing the state of sin that they are in. And while they might fear catching COVID-19, they simply don't realize just how precarious their situation is without the Word of God in their lives. Instead of placing their trust in Jesus, they don't realize that anything is wrong, especially when it comes to their salvation. The very idea of confessing their faults or admission of wrong is offensive to them because - in their thinking - it comes across as weak and is a recipe for disaster. But this couldn't be farther from the truth.

In our Gospel for today, there were some Jews who had believed in Jesus. But when Jesus said, ***"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** (v.31) They replied by saying that they had never been enslaved to anyone. Because at the time, not only were they subject to Rome but in the many years past, they had been slaves in the land of Egypt. And so, while they asserted their independence by referencing their lineage to Abraham, a free man, their discussion with Jesus was about freedom in a spiritual sense. And yet, Jesus exposes the truth that while they, and we, like to think that we are spiritually free, we are all sinners in need of salvation.

This really isn't something that many give much consideration to in our world today. Rather than confessing the sins that we commit on a daily basis, because we are all conceived and born sinful, we become lulled into a false sense of security and become numb to the devastating effects that sin is actually having in our lives and the lives of those around us. Both knowingly and unknowingly, we commit sins through the things that we have done and the things that we have left undone.

That's why confession and absolution are so important for the well-being of our spiritual lives.

When Jesus replied to the Jews who had believed Him, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin,"*** (v.34) we see that the Law of the Word of God shows us the truth about our sins. And yet, when He goes on to say, ***"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."*** (v.35-36) We see also, the Gospel Message through His Word showing us our Savior. ***"For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** (3:16) Jesus is the Son of God, who has become our Savior for all who believe in Him. Nothing that we have done, are doing, or ever will do can bring us salvation. And yet, by graciously taking all our sins upon Himself on the cross, Jesus died and rose again for us so that all our sins might be forgiven, that we might have eternal life, and that we might be able to overcome the devil with all the works and evil ways.

This is the freedom that we receive by faith in His Word that finds a place in us. And when it does, not only does it have an effect on our spiritual lives, but it also has effects on our physical lives as well. Even science is coming to realize this fact. And yet, through His means of Grace that begins with the waters of Holy Baptism, His Spirit comes to dwell within us as our sins are washed away with simple water mixed with His Word. His Spirit guides us in faith, keeps us safe, and helps us to understand the mysteries of the faith. This is something that is being confirmed today as some of our young people will be participating in the rite of confirmation.

And yet, through another means of Grace, His Spirit also gathers us around the sacrament of the altar so that we might receive the forgiveness of our sins, when we receive His body and blood – in, with, and under the bread and the wine. In doing so, we are strengthened in our communion with Him and with one another,

as we celebrate together the proclamation of His death and His resurrection until He comes again.

Until that day comes, as Martin Luther did some 503 years ago, we continue to find ourselves living in a world full of sin. And while indulgences might now be a thing of the past, many believe that freedom is simply being independent of all things, except yourself. Even that has become unbearable for some. Unable to see clearly how devastating and how numb we've all become to the effects of sin in our lives, they simply don't realize their deep need for Jesus to be in their lives on a daily basis. Because Jesus is the One who sets us free from the bondage of sin, enabling us freely to know the truth and live with Him forever. For it is by grace alone, through faith alone, which trusts in The Word alone.

That's why, as His disciples, every one of us has been called to share the precious gift of the Gospel message. So that - your family, friends, and neighbors - everyone might come to know His Word and it might find a place in them. Because, whether they realize it or not, they're also dealing with the spiritual effects of sins in their lives. Yet, our Lord graciously calls all of us back to His Word, so that we might know the truth, and that truth might set us free - to love and serve Him as well as our neighbors, in all that we do and say, both now and always.

In Jesus' name, Amen.