

If you have not yet heard about it, we are nearing the end of a brutal and bitter election season. And, **if** you have not yet heard about it, day after day after day, we have been bombarded with news about issues regarding truth and freedom. In fact, issues regarding truth-telling and freedom have been at the center of debates surrounding voting rights, freedom of speech, gun laws, emails and a whole plethora of other issues. Well, today, **Jesus** is speaking to us about **truth** and **freedom**. However, Jesus' words to us regarding truth and freedom could **not** be more **different** from the way these concepts have been discussed in the news and in present culture.

Today's passage from John takes place within the context of a dialogue between Jesus and his opponents. Jesus' opponents are trapped in their sin, trapped in a dead-end life, and they do not believe in him. They do not believe he is the new revelation of God, the truth. The focus of the dialogue is all about Jesus' identity, it is all about who **Jesus** is. It is a dialogue of faith that centers around two words – **truth** and **freedom**. Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will make you **free**." The truth **Jesus** is talking about is himself. This

truth is **not** just some concept; it is **not** an abstract idea and it is **not** the opposite of falsehood. This truth is a real, living person – the person of Jesus, himself, the person who reveals to us the truth of what God is like, the truth that God is a God of love. And, to connect to Jesus and live in his truth is to be set free from unfaith.

Now, today we are celebrating the Reformation, a change that took place within the church when Martin Luther discovered something about the **truth** of Jesus 499 years ago. Throughout his struggles and throughout his life, Martin Luther participated in a dialogue of faith. Luther was a man who knew intense inner struggle. Luther was tormented because of his own sinfulness. He was a man who knew the depths of depression. Then, one day as he was studying the passage we heard today in our second reading from Romans, he made a discovery that transformed not only **his** life, but also the life of the church and, ultimately, **our** understanding of the gospel. Luther heard the following words as if for the first time and they transformed his entire being. Listen again to these words. ““For there is NO distinction, since **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now **justified by his grace as a gift!**” **Did you hear those words? Justified by his grace AS GIFT!** And,

who receives that gift? The writer of Romans says, “There is **NO** distinction – **ALL** have sinned, and **ALL ARE JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE AS GIFT!**” The Gospel is quite clear. ALL receive the gift! When Martin Luther read those words and truly heard what they were saying, they changed his life and his new understanding brought transformation and change to the church.

It was when Luther made this great discovery about justification by God’s grace as gift that he finally began to understand the **truth** of Jesus’ identity. He understood that Jesus **is** the truth, and Jesus reveals to **us** the truth about God. Luther knew his own captivity to sin, and he was very aware of the church’s captivity to sin. Luther also knew he was not able to free himself from bondage to sin. His **freedom** could only come through Christ. This understanding changed him so deeply that he changed his very name from Ludher to Luther, giving himself a name that meant “the **free** one.”

Martin Luther found himself so deeply transformed by this understanding of truth and freedom that he wanted the church to grasp the reality of the message. Consequently, he nailed 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door describing changes he hoped to see within the Catholic Church. His action then spurred a dialogue of

faith that exploded in the Reformation – an explosion born out of struggle, a deep struggle that transformed and **continues** to transform and reform the church.

Becoming truly free is never easy. Luther found out that grace and truth are not cheap. Knowing the truth of Jesus and living **in** that truth always means facing the cross. And, the cross **always** means death, death to self, death to systems, death to ideologies, and even death to religious practices when they are not faithful to the Word.

When **we** face the truth, we ultimately must look at ourselves. We cannot become free from the chains that bind **us** unless we can honestly face **all** that holds us in bondage and unless we **die** to self. There are all sorts of ways we live in bondage. Not one of us is totally free. We live in bondage to addictions, to competition, to work, to consumerism, to ideologies, to fear, to anxiety, to any number of things in life. And, quite often the things that hold us captive become a way of running from our fears and running from the pain of life. I know. I have spent most of my life living in captivity to work. I also know my workaholic nature has been a way of running from my own pain.

Friends, the One truth that will set us free from all our fears of living and of dying has eluded most people. The absolute truth, which liberated Luther and which liberates all who believe it, is the truth of Jesus as he tells us God loves us and bathes us in grace and mercy. And, quite frankly, this ultimate and awesome reality doesn't keep us from the fires and trials of our life journey; rather, it strengthens and carries us safely through and beyond them. That is what Luther experienced and that is what we experience. The good news for you and for me is that when we stand in the presence of God and are embraced by the gracious loving arms of Jesus, we become able to face the cross. And, when we continue in the Word and become faithful disciples, only **then** are we able to live into the **freedom** of the Son.

The Reformation that began with Martin Luther is a Reformation that is ongoing. As Lutherans, we **claim** that we are a reforming church. We are continually reforming, continually being made new. God continually calls each of us to change and become new beings. God continually calls the church to participate in a dialogue of faith. God is continually calling the church to engage in the process of reformation as we live into the in-breaking, coming reign of God.

By the way, if you have not yet heard, we are nearing the end of a brutal and bitter election season. And, we are daily bombarded with words about truth and freedom. However, on this Reformation Sunday, the good news that is before us is about a **truth** and **freedom** that are of **ultimate** concern, a truth and freedom that **will** change your life. Jesus is saying to each of us, “[Come, let go of your issues and get to know me. Live in my love and live in my Word.] If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you....[because] if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through.” (The Message)