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Year C – Reformation Sunday – October 26, 2025

John 8:31-36

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ, who sets us free. Amen.

“...the truth will make you free.”

On the surface, this seems like a simple thing to say. It’s really inspirational, yes?

The truth will make you free... I’ve seen this verse printed on coffee mugs and tote bags, and I’ve heard it quoted in shows and movies.

The truth will make you free... My truth is that when I hear this, I hear it stated by Marilla Cuthbert from Anne of Green Gables... not the Netflix remake, but the old 1985 version with Megan Follows that I watched on repeat until the VHS tape wore out.

For some reason, when she said it, it felt very important.

The truth will make you free... This statement seems straightforward, and yet, for me, there are these nagging questions that follow... Like what is truth? And what... is freedom?

The more I consider these questions, the more abstract the concepts become... truth and freedom.

Since these are Jesus’ words, we can infer he is speaking to something beyond our human, earthly experience... but that insight doesn’t make it clearer.

Full understanding feels just beyond my grasp... and you know, that’s okay.

Jesus isn’t known for giving clear answers.

Asking questions, yes, but not so much on giving answers. Jesus wants us to sit with his words... to roll them around in our minds.

He said, "If you *continue in my word*, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Jesus' words are an invitation. His words are an invitation to a group of people who are there... because they believe in him.

Like us here today, they believe Jesus has something worth teaching.

But rather than giving up a clear answer, Jesus calls them... like he calls us, to a journey of discovery.

Belief is only the first step. There is so much more to discover.

There is a destination on this journey, but this destination isn't a place... it's a person... it is the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, if you continue in my word... it's important to note here that the word translated as "continue" is the Greek word *meno*... it means to abide... and it shows up 41 times in the Gospel of John... that's a lot...

It gets translated into many different words like continue, stay, dwell, remain... but the word is always *meno*... abide... and its meaning is so much deeper than any of those English words.

To abide is more like... occupying the same physical space.

It is to give our whole identity and person over to the identity and person of Jesus Christ... so much so... that we are entirely different from what we were before.

"...if you abide in my word..."

And abiding with Jesus Christ isn't necessarily the *final* destination either...

abiding with Jesus Christ isn't the promised reward that is only available to us after we die.

Jesus is calling us to abide with him now, to dwell with him today, to continue in his word from this moment on...

and when we accept his invitation to abide... to dwell... to let our very self... become one with the person of Christ, THEN we will become his disciples.

“...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Becoming a disciple means accepting Jesus’ invitation to journey *toward* understanding truth and freedom.

Jesus’ invitation is to journey toward the understanding that Jesus IS truth, the truth that makes known the eternal God... because Jesus IS the eternal God.

Becoming a disciple means embracing the journey toward a truth... that sets us free...

It is a truth that sets *all* people free, the freedom to recognize that Jesus is God, here with us, offering love, provision, and protection.

This truth... and this freedom... they take a lifetime and beyond to understand because God is not restricted by our human perceptions... and our limited interpretations.

And this truth that sets us free is for *all* people because God so loves *the whole world*.

Jesus is truth, and this truth is freedom, but fully understanding it is just beyond our grasp, imploring us to *keep* learning and *keep* growing.

Jesus said, “If you *abide* in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Jesus is inviting us to dwell with him, to abide in his words.

What Jesus calls us to is a serious commitment of continual growth and learning ...of being changed by this mutually abiding relationship.

Jesus calls us to allow ourselves to be formed and RE-formed by his Word... to embrace a continual state of being made new.

Now... I want to pause here a moment... because we follow the lectionary... the three-year cycle of scripture readings... which means we have been on a steady march through the Gospel of Luke...

traveling with Jesus toward Jerusalem... and the cross.

Like all authors, Luke has his own literary style and his own agenda for his Gospel.

For Luke, and specifically for the passages we have been dwelling in these last couple of months, it is... a travel narrative... drawing together a pluralistic community under the name of Jesus...

and emphasizing that the promises of salvation and the kingdom of God are open to all peoples, but most especially... the marginalized, the poor, the disabled, women, and Gentiles... anyone whom society pushes out.

Luke's gospel stresses the importance of community, and how we live together and share our resources... as part of our mission and call as disciples.

Through his way of telling the story, Luke emphasizes that our God is not a conquering war hero... but a humble Savior... who turns expectations upside down... and saves people in unexpected ways... through healing, forgiveness, wholeness, and restoration.

But now for Reformation Sunday, we interrupt our march through Luke... to hear from the gospel of John.

For John, his primary theological claim is that Jesus IS God who offers us salvation through a relationship with him... and to prove God's faithfulness to us, Jesus goes willingly to the cross to lay down his life for us.

We are continually invited into a relationship with *God through Jesus*... and it is through this relationship that we receive grace and salvation.

And like any relationship... it requires daily nourishment... it requires investment in who we are becoming as we journey with Jesus as disciples... as we abide in his Word.

I wanted to point this out for you... because for me... it actually feels a bit jarring to dig as deeply into the Luke narrative as we have been and to lean into Luke's way of understanding Christ... only to then jump into a different perspective without at least acknowledging the shift.

And yet... both Gospels are true...and both offer us the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Savior who takes away the sin of the world.

But when we take notice their differences in perspective... instead of blending them together into one harmonized gospel... I think it gives us a richer understanding of God, through Jesus, in whom we abide.

And so... on this Reformation Sunday... I think it is quite perfect that we look to John, who so strongly emphasizes our relationship with Jesus...

that on this day of celebrating that we are continually Re-forming... continually growing and changing because of our relationship with God through Jesus... who better to hear from... than John...

John... who understands that when Jesus calls us to abide, it is an ongoing process...

It's not a once-and-done salvation experience, but a lifelong relationship.

And that when Jesus calls us to abide as his disciples... that we are being called into a communal relationship... we are being called into community.

Something that Luke certainly supports!

This journey of discipleship... of abiding in God's word... we do this together...

we abide in Jesus' Word as a community of believers... supporting each other through joy and sorrow... through strong faith and doubt.

We abide in Jesus' Word together... because we share the same goal of being formed and re-formed by God's Word.

We abide in Jesus' Word together so that over time, our understanding of God, and of God's gifts of grace and salvation will grow...

Receiving this grace brings *freedom... Freedom* to dedicate your life to reflecting God's love onto your neighbors rather than chasing salvation for yourself.

Receiving God's grace is to know the *truth* that this grace is *God's* gift to us, given through Jesus, who invites us to spend our lives with him. Our lives here and now, in this place. Today.

"If you *abide* in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

These are, indeed, important words.

Believing in Jesus is only the beginning,

but knowing the truth that *is* Jesus, who is God, and the freedom that truth brings... is a lifelong journey that will continually change us in the most beautiful ways.

This is the invitation Jesus offers you...

to choose this life and this journey with Christ to discover how abiding in Jesus as a lifelong disciple will reveal God's glorious truth and God's most beautiful freedom.

Amen.
