

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

John 8:31-36
THE TRUTH WILL SET US FREE

INI

There is only one week to go before the midterm election. I'm sure that all of us are anxious that it will finally be over! I believe that this is one of the most important elections in our history. Who is going to control Congress? Where are we heading as a nation? There are two very different interpretations of where we have been, where we are now and where we need to go in the future. Our text this morning brings up two very important words that affect us as Christians and as citizens of the United States of America: truth and freedom.

We want truth, but where do we get it? Do we get it from the candidates themselves? If you listen to both parties, both claim to be speaking the truth, but you have two very different views. Do we get it from the media? You will have two very different slants on what candidates say and do depending upon which television channel you watch or which newspaper you read. What can we believe? What do we reject as falsehood? Things are constantly changing. The history books are constantly being rewritten. Some schools refuse to celebrate Columbus Day, saying that he was an evil man. Many textbooks have taken out any reference to Christianity in our nation's history. One candidate will use numbers, the other will use percentages to make their case. Both will claim that what they are saying is truth. We understand Pontius Pilate as he asked our Lord Jesus, "What is truth?"

We want freedom. Our country has enjoyed the blessing of freedom for 246 years. We want the freedom to worship without persecution. We want the freedom to assemble. We want the freedom of speech, saying what we want even though it may be uncomfortable and even offensive. We want the freedom to travel, to come and go as we please. We know that under communism there is no freedom and there is no truth.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!" These words are often quoted, but they are usually misquoted. They do not apply to anything that someone calls truth, but rather the very words of the one who is the Truth. On this 505th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, let us see how THE TRUTH WILL SET US FREE.

Jesus is in a very serious discussion with his people. John, Chapter 8 is one of the most important chapters in all of Scripture. Who is Jesus? Everyone has an opinion of that. There are many ideas. The people were divided then, and the people are divided today. Is he a saint or a sinner? Is he an angel or a demon? Many people will speak highly of Jesus. They will call him a prophet, perhaps the greatest of God's prophets. They will call him a good teacher, bringing up many of the loving things that he said. They will call him a moral example, saying that we need more people like him in this world. And there are those who call him misguided, a fraud, and a deceiver. If we let Jesus speak, we hear his claim that he is the very Son of God come down from heaven to be our Savior. At the end of our chapter, he makes his claim to be God himself, the great I AM.

We hear that many put their faith in him. They saw Jesus for who he truly was. They listened to Jesus' words. He spoke with authority, the authority of God himself. But many did not and would not believe. The discussion took a turn for the worse. What is all this talk about freedom? We are already free!

Isn't that strange? They had conveniently forgot about 400 years of slavery in Egypt and another 70 years in Babylon, not to mention that they were now under Roman rule in Palestine and chafed under the Roman government. But perhaps they were actually thinking spiritually. They couldn't be in slavery. They were children of Abraham. They could trace their ancestry back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. They could recite the promises that God had given to Abraham as to how this would be their land. They could even speak of God's promise to send a Messiah. Of course, they wouldn't accept Jesus as that Messiah, no matter how many Scriptures he fulfilled (and there were over 300 of them). They could recite the commandments (and let's remember that the Pharisees were not content with only ten. They had 613 commandments to keep them busy.) Outwardly they looked pretty good. They didn't bow down to idols of wood and stone like the Gentiles did. They lived outwardly good lives (at least some of them).

Yet Jesus called them slaves! To sin! And so are we! Now isn't that going a bit too far? Yes, they were sinners. Very few people then or today will actually see themselves as perfect. We know the things that we have said and done. We also know our thoughts, but we think that we're safe there because no one can read our minds. Yes, we see sin, but slaves? Our pride tricks us. Satan deceives us. We look out there in the world and see so many people that we consider worse than us: real sinners, murderers, rapists, robbers, drug pushers, sexual perverts. Yes, these are the real slaves to sin. Look at what they've done!

Our slavery masquerades as freedom. We think that we can break away at any time. We can stop any time we want. I can just try harder. I can conquer this problem. We think that we have it within us. Yet this is a lie. Satan leads us to believe that we are the masters of our own fate. Our own sinful nature leads us to believe that we can do anything on our own.

Yet the Scriptures are crystal clear. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In Romans, Chapter 3, the Apostle Paul hammers away at this foolish notion: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Yes, that includes people like Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, Martin Luther, you, and me.

We are not only sinners, but we are slaves to sin. That includes every form of sin: the bad things we do, the good things we fail to do, careless words, hatred, or greed in our hearts. And the wages of sin is death. We need to realize the truth before anything can be done. We are like the inept prisoners who think that we can tunnel our way to freedom. We are in prison. We steal a spoon, and we start digging. Day after day, week after week, month after month, we dig and dig and dig. Finally, we have broken free, we think. But we don't have a blueprint or a compass. As we break through, we simply realize that we have broken into the cell next door. We try again. We go even longer. This time we come up in the guard's room. We try again. This time we come up in the warden's office. No matter how hard we try and how much effort we exert, we always come up in prison.

Martin Luther knew that well. He was troubled by the idea of how to get right with God. You name it, he tried it. Memorizing the Psalms, going to chapel five times a day, taking a pilgrimage to Rome, sweeping dirt floors, even beating his own body. Nothing worked. He knew what was in his heart. He didn't love God. He hated God. How could he ever get right with God on his own merits?

Then he finally realized through reading the Scriptures that he could not conquer his problem with the slavery to sin. God was the answer to his problem. God not only could supply the solution. God did supply the solution. He did that through his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into this world to be our divine Substitute. The Law condemned us. It demands nothing less than total perfection. None of us could live up to it. But Jesus did. He lived the perfect life of love and obedience that we could not. And because he was God, his perfect life could be credited to our account. And there was still the matter of sin. Sin is an offense to a just and a holy God. If the wages of sin was death, then someone would have to pay. Jesus did pay. He took all our sins into his own body and suffered God's punishment for those sins. He died on the cross as our divine Substitute. And because he was God, he could pay the full ransom price for the sin of the world. How do we know that? Because Jesus rose from the dead! His sacrifice was accepted as complete payment. We are forgiven!

This is God's gift to you! You did absolutely nothing. Saint Paul happily told the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." That is the truth, the truth revealed through the Scriptures, the truth that sets us free. We are freed from the lies of Satan and the world.

We are freed from the slavery to sin. We are also freed from the guilt of sin. Jesus paid for all my sins, the ones I remember and the ones that I have long ago forgotten. If these sins have been paid for, I am not guilty. I am justified. Paul said in our Second lesson: "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

We are also freed from the power of sin. It is no longer our master. Although we are still sinners until the day we leave this world, we can use Christ's power to defeat sin and to live a God-pleasing life. We were baptized into Christ. Paul also said to the Romans in chapter six: "In the same way, count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace."

We do not want to return to slavery. Jesus tells us: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." We may hear the truth, but we can forget it. We need to be constantly in the Word of God, living in it, studying it, hearing it, partaking of the Lord's Supper. The people of Luther's day lost the Gospel. Luther returned the people to the Scriptural principles of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in the Scriptures alone. We are always only one generation away from losing the Gospel. We must hold on to this dearest treasure and share it with the world.

Jesus is the truth. He is the God-man, our Savior. We trust in him completely for our salvation. That truth sets us free! AMEN.