



“Bound Free”

Reformation Sunday
Saturday and Sunday, October 27 - 28, 2018

All services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 46;
Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In 1517 the Protestant Reformation began with a bang on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. A Bible professor named Martin Luther made an invitation to an academic debate on confession, absolution and especially the role of indulgences. A forgiveness certificate was sold by the church that took time off of purgatory for one's sins and was recognized even back then as something that was widely abused. The Reformation ideas that God's grace is free, that scripture is authoritative for our faith and life and should be studied by every Christian, and that worship should be in the language of the people rather than in Latin. These ideas spread like wildfire throughout Christian Europe. Three years later in 1520 the Roman church issued a denunciation of Martin Luther and ordered him to halt his preaching and his teaching and threatened to charge him as a heretic which meant that he could be arrested at any time and executed on the spot.

Luther responded with three treatises which sought to explain the Lutheran reformation theology and ideas. The last one was entitled ***On the Freedom of the Christian*** and was an attempt to persuade to the Pope that the reformer's faith was consistent with holy scripture.

The tract begins with two seemingly contradictory propositions: The first, **A Christian is an utterly free person, lord of all, subject to none.** You and I have been made right with God. We have been free from sin and death because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Secondly, **A Christian is an utterly dutiful person, servant of all, subject to all.** As Christ taught, our freedom is lived out in loving service to our neighbor. Christians are Bound Free. Bound to each other in love, and free from that which enslaves us.

Following the words of Jesus and St. Paul, Luther asserted that it is by faith alone, that God sets you and me free in Christ. . . We are forgiven. . . and therefore justified before God. "If the Son sets you free," Jesus says, "you will be free indeed." And we need to be set free because there is too much in this world that binds us and dominates our life.

Biblical scholar William Barclay, in his Daily Study Bible on the Gospel of John, lists four things that **enslave us** and from which Jesus makes us free: fear, ourselves, other people and sin.

We are enslaved by fear. What frightens you? Now I am not talking about creepy clowns, or zombies, although they're frightening, spiders or the dark, or public speaking. What makes you wake up in the middle of the night with that feeling that you have in the pit of your stomach? Is it regrets that you have, an unfulfilled past, mistakes that you made, inadequacy, being alone, death either your own or a loved one? Luther wrote a hymn, "*A Mighty Fortress is our God*, and in the hymn, it is the hope for us to focus not on fear, but on the blessed assurance that Jesus gives us. In the hymn Luther talks about a sword and a shield that is victorious over the things that frighten us.

We are enslaved to ourselves as well. We are as the phrase goes, our own worst enemies and there are times throughout our life where we carry a long a poor self-worth or poor image. We're unable to forgive ourselves for mistakes or we get upset with our imperfections. Paul writing in his letters tells us that our righteousness comes to us through faith in Christ to all who believe! We are made new, we are a new creation. God declares us perfect through the life, death and resurrection through Christ.

We can be enslaved too by other people. Worrying what other people will think about us and so we find ourselves trying to keep up with the Jones or buying into the latest fad, trying to please our parents or grandparents, or friends, or teachers, or bosses. It becomes a never-ending cycle trying to please other people, but we realize that we can't please everyone, it's not possible. But, we have been made in the image of God, we have been wonderfully made by God and the only approval that we need is from God himself and He declares us righteous.

Life is too short and so we must learn to control what we can, not which is out of our control. And we are enslaved by sin. As our confession says, we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We live in a broken relationship with God and others. And again, this is a cycle that can be repeated over and over and over again and that's why the church lifts up confession so much including at the beginning of our worship services.

Socrates said, "How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?" Sin grabs ahold of us, addictions, hatred, self-loathing, selfishness, greed, violence. And as we saw this week in Pittsburgh, anti-Semitism. Jesus calls us "slaves to sin."

Lutheran Pastor Jerry Schmalemberger tells the story of a local Niagara Falls man that he once met. The man shared with him that he has seen birds carried over the brink of the falls in the winter months. It seems the birds would fly down and land in the river to get some water and then would fly away, but the more and more that they did that the water on their wings would begin to form as ice crystals until finally they were no longer to get the lift and then they just simply floated right off of the falls.

Sin Schmalemberger writes, "is as deceptive as the sparkling water of Niagara's wintry rapids. Dip into it once too often, and we are not able to lay aside the weight which sin gives us by clinging so closely."

We are bound to sin, captive to sin, it creeps up and we are unable to free ourselves from its grip.

In the face of this reality Jesus declares to you and to me, you are free. And like the character that Mel Gibson plays Scottish patriot William Wallace in the movie *Braveheart* "What will you do with that freedom?"

Faith is never earned, it comes to us as a gift through the love of Jesus Christ for you and then we are bound to one another in love. It is that same love that binds us as dutiful servants to our neighbors, subject to everyone. Faith and love. . . Duty and delight.

Christians live in between these poles that Martin Luther spoke of in the **Freedom of the Christian**: we are bound and free. It our duty and our delight.

Christian Freedom is a gift from Jesus himself to the church. And we are baptized into **His** name, and therefore called Christians. Bound in love, Free in faith. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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