

Freedom
John 8:31-36

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What if Paul ended that sentence there. For All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What would that mean for all of us? We are sinners, everyone of us and we all fall short of God's glory. We are worthless sinners that deserve punishment and eternal strife. We don't deserve to stand before the Lord Almighty and expect anything good, but instead judgment since we are all guilty. Guilt of sin, deserving the wrath of God and the punishment of hell.

You probably wouldn't like that if I started each sermon and ended each sermon in that way. If each of my sermons simply reminded you that you are each are worthless, sinners, fallen creatures, without hope, deserving punishment and really only deserve God's distain and judgment. Stop and think about how you would feel if that is all you kept hearing from the pulpit. And more importantly you believed it to be true, to the very letter of the law, you were condemned to eternal punishment for your sins. Think about what that might be like to know with out a doubt that for eternity, forever you were going to suffer in hell. The fires and darkness and pain will be with you forever, no getting out of it, no avoiding it, no getting free of it. Think about what kind of feeling that must be to have that sentence of eternal suffering hanging over your head.

I don't think we think about that to much anymore. We have heard about grace and forgiveness, so there is no reason to fear. But to understand our Gospel reading and the true meaning of reformation you have to put your thoughts into a different mindset. Not everyone knew about Grace and forgiveness. There was a time when people were pressured by the fear of the eternal flames. So today lets go back a few hundred years. Approximately 500 years or so, to a time when the church was the Holy Roman Empire, the state was the faith and the faith was the state of your entire world. You are peasants or even if lucky some middle class merchants or traders. Most of you can not read or write. Most of you have no education. Most of you work and live in the same house your family has for generations. You faithfully go to church, because you have to by law of the church and the empire. The entire service is in Latin and you understand just a bit. Some of you if lucky get a seat at for the several hours of worship, most of you have to stand the entire time instead. You to see the priest take the communion and consume the body and blood of Christ, but you have no right to take part in that meal because you obviously are a sinner and not a holy person like the ordained leaders.

You hear each week a sermon preached to you from the pulpit generally ten feet or so above your heads centered in the front. The priest would have a large open Bible, one of the few books you have ever seen in your lives sitting on that pulpit and He would read to you from the texts:

Perhaps from Jeremiah 30:

Why you cry out over your hurt, your pain is incurable. Because your guilt is great, because your sins are so numerous. I have done these things to you.

Or from Matthew Chapter 5:

Jesus said, If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult a brother or sister you will be liable to the council, and if you say YOU FOOL, you will be liable to the hell of fire. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Or from 2 Peter Chapter 2:

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment, then the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

Then that preacher would preach from these words you never saw and you would listen to them point out your sinfulness. Of how you are the unrighteous that God is seeking out to destroy. This is not a sermon you would hear just once, but a sermon you heard your entire life. The fire is licking at your feet even now, waiting to torment you for all ages.

Now that is some fear to have pressuring you each week. Wouldn't you have a fear of God, a fear of death, a fear of judgment day. Martin Luther grew up in this type of world. He had fear for his eternal soul. He feared God's wrath, God's anger. Luther feared the hatred of God for those who live in sin, since Luther knew he was a sinner. This worried him as a youth and as a young man even when traveling on the road one day going back to school after a holiday at home. A severe thunderstorm dropped Luther to the dirt of the road in fear for his life. He prayed that if his life was spared he would devote it to the church. And so having lived through the storm, he became a monk of the Augustinian order. But even in the monastery he feared for his eternal soul. If the angels that sinned were cast into hell, what chance did he have. He sought freedom through a pilgrimage, through very long confessions, through praying, but all it did is remind him that he was a sinner deserving of God's wrath. Finally turning to scripture, studying the original texts in Greek and Hebrew, Luther came across the Words of Paul in Romans and Galatians. He rediscovered in that holy word the power of grace, that we are sinners, and that we do in fact deserve punishment, and yet even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, taking our punishment for us. He rediscovered the redeeming act of the

Loving Christ – for we can not make our selves perfect enough to stand before God, but through Christ we are given forgiven and sanctified to stand before God as children of the eternal kingdom.

The people had lived in fear for so long. They had lived under the sentence of hell, of punishment of hatred of God for so long. That suddenly with Luther's words and challenges people were hearing a new hope. A new word of love and forgiveness. A word of Freedom. With the coming of the reformation suddenly people were hearing scriptures read to them in their own languages. To sing songs in their own languages and worship and pray in their own language in words they understood. They began to hear of the grace and forgiveness aht fills the pages of the Bible. They were invited to receive the body and blood of Christ to receive the sacrament of Christ's real presence and forgiveness of sins. But most importantly they were given and assurance of Hope. A hope that went beyond this world and into the everlasting kingdom. They were given the gift of the Gospel. They had been given a gift of knowing a loving God.

I don't we think about that to much anymore. We have heard about grace and forgiveness, so we don't have that same reason to fear. We have grown accustomed to hearing about the words of Paul. But because of this knowledge and faith we have growing up in this day and age we forget the excitement and joy it must have been to hear the freedom and grace of Jesus Christ. We have kind of lost that fear of judgment because we know that Christ is the one who justifies us with God, and places us in the eternal family. Perhaps it is time to remember that joy and celebration once again.

Jesus tells the people in the crowds today in our Gospel reading that if they continue in his word, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. But if you read on in the chapter, you will hear the people wonder about this since they didn't even know they were prisoners. They think they are already free. But we know that Jesus was talking about sin, faithlessness, unrighteousness. The people are prisoners to this world and the desires that surround us all. They missed the joy and celebration of knowing that through Jesus, the one who is the Truth, they are made free.

So maybe today it would be good to remember that we are free in Christ, our truth and Our Light. Yes we are all sinful, yes we deserve punishment. But we have one who one who is put forth as our sacrifice of atonement by his own blood, Jesus Christ. Celebrate this day that joy and thanksgiving that we know the freedom of Christ. As our young confirmands re-affirm their baptisms, let us also re-affirm our own baptisms, celebrating the faith of knowing the truth,

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the one who sets us free, and grants us grace and forgiveness now and always. Celebrate that freedom today, for if the son makes you free, you will be free indeed! Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.