

November 1, 2020

John 8:31-36

**“The Truth Will Set You Free!”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Ave.  
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On a back road with long deep ruts made by the repeated passage of the wheels of cars and trucks, where only a small number of people who lived in the area traveled, an old man was carefully placing sticks with big red flags to mark the places that were extremely dangerous. Since only those who knew the road well traveled over it, he was asked: "Why are you wasting your time marking the road?" He answered: "Well, believe it or not, it's the folks around here who travel this road who need the warnings. You see, they're the ones who get lost in the drive and forget about the danger spots."

As we travel the narrow road of faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, we also are prone to forget the danger spots. We feel that all the sticks with the red flags are for everybody else and not us. But the truth of the matter is that we are the ones who often get complacent on the narrow road, so that we stop paying attention to all of the dangers that would put an end to our journey. The Holy Spirit knows we need the sticks with red flags, and that is why in our gospel lesson for this morning Jesus says: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ... Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever ..."

**The Truth Will Set You Free!** And freedom from sin in Christ is a treasure. But, whoever practices sin is a slave to sin and does not remain in the house. In another place it says "outside are the dogs (Rev. 22:15)." The dogs are those who allow their sins to have dominion over them. They defend sin and encourage others to do the same. That's a stick with a big red flag in our well-traveled road don't you think? Jesus says that his disciples are to continue in the truth and remain free. Baptized disciples who are taught the truth continue to die to sin and live in freedom from it.

The problem is that, as we are on this long journey on the narrow road, we tend to get lost in the long drive and become prone to stop paying attention to the dangers of losing what has been so graciously given in the cross of Christ. Freedom from ignorance, freedom from sin, and freedom from the fear of death and hell are most wonderful gifts that have been given to us through the life that Jesus lived for us and the sufferings and death he endured for us. But amazingly there is still that part of us that is attracted to the slavery that we left behind. I know it's hard to accept that, but there really is a darkness in us that craves dark things and even sometimes pursues them. Consider the example of the Israelites.

The Israelites had endured the sting of Egyptian whips for centuries. The Egyptians afflicted them with heavy burdens. But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew as a nation. The Egyptians dreaded the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly, making their lives bitter in hard slavery even to the point where Pharaoh commanded that their newborn sons were to be killed. The Lord God raised up a deliverer among them who would point to the deliverance of Jesus. Through the Passover lamb, that foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus to free us from sin and death, the people leave their Egyptian slavery. They enter a sort of baptism in the red sea and safely make it to the other side while the waters fall back on the Egyptians. The Lord provides for his people in the wilderness, yet it isn't enough for the people. They complain about all their misfortunes in the hearing of the Lord. Shockingly, they long for Egypt and

literally weep: “Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at (Numbers 11:4-6).”

Crazy isn't it? But it's not so crazy when you think about how we often find ourselves unsatisfied with God's richness in the means of grace. There are moments when we long to satisfy our sinful desires, and we end up embracing the slavery of doing what we know is wrong. “But it's so good,” we say to ourselves, “surely God will understand.” But he doesn't understand as sinful humans would have him understand. The people of Israel were so fed up with the gift of manna that they didn't want to even look at it. How often we get fed up with the preaching of the word, the living of our baptisms, and the holy supper! It's as if life was so much better when we lived in sin and death. Isn't it a strange and horrible thing that we can find ourselves desperately craving anything and everything but our Savior? That's why we need the sticks with red flags, so that we do not fly off the road and into a ditch or over a rocky cliff.

May our Lord God have mercy on us and help us to get through such moments. And he does. If we do sin we have one who speaks to the father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And when we face temptation we have our Savior who was tempted just like us and taught us the way to overcome. Faith in Jesus is the way out. The shield of faith can extinguish the flaming arrows of the devil. May the Lord grant us strength to see the sticks with red flags and avoid the danger spots, and may he get us on track when we tend to sleep at the wheel.

There isn't any generation of Christian that doesn't struggle with continuing in the Word. That sinful flesh in us is always whispering, “tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies.” But we need to remember that they are lies. And the devil is not only a liar but a murderer of souls. We would do well to consider the words of Paul in Romans 6:20-22, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”

Again, there isn't any generation of Christian that doesn't struggle with continuing in the Word. Look at the time of the Reformation. When Luther was growing up the Bible was a rare book. Bible reading was not encouraged. In fact, you had to have permission from the church authorities to read the Bible. That's hard to really imagine but we shouldn't think that it can't be suppressed again. No doubt there are those in our country who wish for the days when you could hardly find a Bible. Even more they wish that the Bible could be removed from the earth. People love their slavery. May God take away from our hearts the love of sinning and enlarge our hearts with love for him and for our neighbor. This he does at the foot of the cross where we see the fullness of love in the giving of Christ for us.

Indeed, the only thing that can turn our hearts from loving sin is to see how horrible sin really is and how great the love of God is in Jesus Christ, our Truth and Freedom. We can only love if the Truth first loves us, which he does with an everlasting love, for he willingly stretched out his arms on the cross to free us from our sins and give eternal life. It is the hearing and preaching and teaching of the Bible, the visible

gospel of baptism, and the holy supper that takes us to the Truth, who is Jesus, and with him the freedom of forgiveness and life. It is no wonder that Luther wanted everyone to have a copy and read the Bible after he read that our righteousness is found in Christ and not in our works. It's interesting that when Luther was appointed to teach on the Bible, he was not all that thrilled. Furthermore, he had to go and search for a copy. But, when he finally did read it and found the freedom of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life, he set about translating it into the common language of the people so they could read it too. And once Luther had translated it, the printing presses could not make enough copies for the people so that one of Luther's enemies made this complaint:

Luther's New Testament was so much multiplied and spread by printers that even tailors and shoemakers, yea, even women and ignorant persons who had accepted this new Lutheran gospel, and could read a little German, studied it with the greatest eagerness as the fountain of all truth. Some committed it to memory, and carried it about in their heart. In a few months such people deemed themselves so learned that they were not ashamed to dispute about faith and the gospel not only with Catholic laymen, but even with priests and monks and doctors of divinity.

Oh that the enemies of Christ would have this complaint today!

It is the Bible that really captures Luther. You will hardly find a memorial statue of him anywhere without a Bible in his hands. In fact, I have a bobble-head of Luther and a wind-up walking Luther and in both he is holding a Bible. If Luther were here today, he would say what he said when he was alive. "Find your comfort and consolation in the promises of God in Christ Jesus. Continue in the Word! In the Bible you will by his grace overcome." He would echo the words of his Savior, **"The Truth Will Set You Free!"**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott