

Every one of you is free to do what you want after church is over today. Some of you might be thinking about getting a little lunch at a restaurant. You pick the restaurant. Some of you might be wanting to play some video games at home. You pick which video games you want to play. Some of you might be looking forward to a nap, watching some football, or playing with toys in your room. I won't stop you from any of them. Sleep as long as you want. Watch your favorite team. Enjoy playing with your toys. Nobody else is going to stop you either. You're free. A free society allows you all these choices today and every day to do what you want, when you want, and how you want to. You're even free to come to the Joint Reformation service at Grace in Norman at 4:00 pm.

Or is that true? While you can pick the restaurant you can't leave without paying. While you can pick which video game to play you shouldn't make the dangerous video games come to real life. You can nap but not while you're supposed to be responsible for your child. You can watch football but you can't legally gamble on the games. You can play with your toys but not toys made with certain bad chemicals. You can't speed to get to Grace for the Joint Reformation service. There are some things you simply can't do. I'm sorry to say it, but that doesn't sound like freedom. We can't do whatever we might want, when we want, and how we want.

In most people's minds freedom is understood as the ability to do whatever we want without any restrictions utilizing our rights and our powers. In America, freedom like that is outlined in our founding documents. There are certain rights and freedoms that simply can't be taken away. Life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, religion, and speech; every one of them is a freedom we have.

The Jews Jesus was talking to in the gospel thought the same way about themselves. Jesus spoke of freedom and they immediately responded, **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"** They were already free, or so they thought. Forgetting the obvious times in their history when they were slaves in Egypt, captives in Babylon, and most recently under the rule of the Romans, they believed freedom came because of their famous ancient father. Abraham's blood ran through their veins. He was one of God's favorite people. Therefore they must be some of God's favorite people.

We're all actually slaves. In bondage, not really free. You may not be convinced. You may claim you're free. But we can't escape reality. We live under laws. Every one of them is binding on us some telling us to do things we don't naturally want to do. When the government says pay your taxes your first response is not, "Alright let me get my checkbook." We complain, then we pay. Your classroom at school probably has a list of rules hanging somewhere. These aren't suggestions. You break the rules at school your name goes on the board. Do something bad enough and you'll find yourself in the principal's office. Every rule at school, every law in the country, every house rule means we're not completely and totally free.

Centuries ago Greek philosophers thought at the very least you could be free within yourself. Laws were needed for society, so absolute freedom couldn't exist there. But you had to be free to make decisions that affected your spiritual life. Do good things and your eternal life would be good. Do bad things and your eternal life would be one of punishment. The choice had to be yours. Some people still think that eternal life is decided by your actions here on earth. Live a pretty good life and eternity is going to be good. Hurt other people, make poor decisions and eternal life will deservedly be bad.

But can we be good enough? We can't walk past someone sketchy looking without getting a little nervous or protective. We judge them before we know them. We can't control our greedy thoughts when our neighbor gets something new and shiny. We want it too. We can't look at someone attractive in magazines, on TV, or in real life without letting our minds wander a bit. Turns out inside we're not free either from making mistakes and doing bad things.

Jesus was right. **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family."** One prejudice, one greedy thought, one lustful thought, that's sin. One sin and we're sinners. Sinning is what we do and how we live. In reality we're trying to regard ourselves as gods of our own lives. We strive for freedom. But we don't have it. We're not free from sin. We're under sin's control. That's slavery. Slaves to rules and laws. Slaves to sin when we break them. Slaves to sin we can't escape.

We may not be denying that today. Luther didn't. Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk and priest in the early 16th century, couldn't deny that he was sinful. It was answer to sin that left him wanting. He heard from the church that he needed to make up for his sins and all the bad he did. The church's answer to sin was saying to have people say a certain number of prayers, pay a certain amount, feel enough guilt. Do these things, the church said, and you'll get yourself right with God.

As you might imagine it did nothing to make people feel better. After trying to feel better by what they did, they still felt the guilt. Nothing had taken the sin or the guilt away. Jesus made it clear that slaves to sin never get right with God on their own. There was only one way to get right with God. Only one way to be truly free. **"If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** Jesus. The way to be free is the truth of Christ.

Martin Luther had been tormented for years. Depressed and angry with God he was not free. A story is told about Luther when he reached a spiritual crisis one time. He had a discussion where the devil was accusing him of tremendous wickedness against God. A long list of sins was presented, each one a stinging condemnation that Luther was guilty of. Finally when the list was long, filled with every conceivable type of sin, the devil stopped. Luther then said, "Okay, now take a pen and some red ink and write across that list, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses me from all sin.'" Where did Luther get that marvelous truth? How did he know he was free? Jesus. The truth that sets people free is Jesus.

True freedom is found in God's Word. Freedom from all your sins comes by way of God's grace. Under grace you can surrender your freedom to God. In return, God declares you righteous. He makes you right with him. Jesus earned that righteousness, that freedom. God's love comes from God through Christ. To know Jesus is to be in the Word. To be in the Word is to find Jesus. You have freedom from sin and death in the resurrection of Christ proclaimed in the Word. That truth alone sets you free. God's Word sets you free so you're no longer a slave to sin.

Plumbers, electricians, contractors who you have hired to work in your home on different things come and go. At the end of the project though, they don't move in. They're out. Sin causes us to have to move out. Outside the family of God, separated from him. We couldn't expect a place in his house. Our sins pull us away from God. The Word of God seems to be foolishness in our sins.

There is a way into the family. Jesus proclaimed a way to be inside where God is, calling God father. A way to be free. **"Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** The Son of the God sets you free. He is the Son of God and the Savior. Luther's sole purpose was to point people to Christ Jesus. Nothing less would save them. Nothing less than Christ will save you. In Christ alone my hope is found. You stand on that truth. Christ Jesus sets you free.

God's grace worked faith in your hearts to believe God's message about Christ. You're reborn into this faith. Renewed daily by the Holy Spirit in the Word. You're free. And when the Son of God sets you free, you're more than just a free person who can come and go in God's house. More than that, actual sons and daughters of the King. Children by grace through faith. Adopted into the family and heirs with Christ. Everything Christ earned becomes yours. What happened to him will happen to you. He died for your sins but rose again. You will die, but in Christ you will be raised to life again. Jesus went to heaven and that's where you're going. You receive what Christ received. Glory and honor, except yours is undeserved. It's grace because the Son sets you free. God's Word sets you free as children of the Father.

We call ourselves Lutherans, calling to mind Martin Luther. 498 years ago yesterday, Luther was led to start a reformation in the church. He was worried that people were relying on their heritage and on the things they did in order to be saved. It all felt empty, like it really couldn't save anybody. Truth was, it couldn't. But there was a truth that could save everybody. God led Luther to discover it where it had always been. God's Word clearly says in Jesus' own words, **"Hold to my teaching...know the truth...the truth sets you free...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** There is forgiveness for your sins. There is a future guaranteed in Christ. Luther wouldn't want us celebrating him this morning or this afternoon at the Joint Reformation service at Grace in Norman at 4:00. Celebrate the one thing that sets you free, God's Word. Hear how Christ sets us free from our slavery to sin. Hear how you're children of God by faith. God's Word sets you free.