

CHRIST CHURCH SERMON REFORMATION SUNDAY – 10/29/17

GOSPEL LESSON: John 8:31-36 Page 975-976

John 8:31-36 (NRSV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

SERMON: “Freedom”

Rev. Anderson

I want to start this morning with a story I heard at the UCC Maine conference a week ago Saturday. It begins with a man walking down a road at dusk. We know nothing about the man but we know he was trying to get to his journey’s end. He may have been a pilgrim or he may just have been trying to get home before it got too dark.

As the light faded, a fog blew in to where he could not see his way. He eventually saw a tiny light off the road and recognized it as a cabin. Walking up to the door, he knocked to ask for help. The door was opened by a hermit who asked what the man wanted. He said that he had lost his way in the fog and needed some help getting to his destination. The hermit said: “Wait a minute. I have just what you need.” He went away for a minute and returned with an old and very dim lantern, “This should help,” he said.

The man seeking directions said: “It is so dim. I can only see a few feet ahead with it. How will I find my way?”

The hermit replied: “Hold it out in front of you and you will be able to see a few feet of the road. Just walk to the end of what you can see and then hold it out again. Keep repeating these steps and eventually you will get there.”

Christians have been following these directions in many ways for the last 500 years since Martin Luther posted his 95 Thesis on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. The fog may be thicker and more impenetrable

today, but it has been around us forever. All we can do is keep moving forward, a few steps at a time. It takes faith that what we need will be there when we need it.

In the John text I just read Jesus says that we are no longer second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God which was a crazy thing to say in the first century, because there were totally second-class citizens everywhere except they weren't called citizens at all, but slaves. Jesus knows this. He knows people are going to have a hard time believing that someone can move you from being a slave to being free. That can only be done by the king or the heir of the king. And that's what Jesus does because that's who Jesus is. He is the heir, the one who can pronounce freedom. The one who can invite people to leave their chains behind and claim the abundant life and freedom God offers. That is the truth that makes you free: that God has *already* made you free and called you a beloved child. You no longer need to have someone standing between you and God

It's about freedom.

The whole Reformation, while we're at it. From Paul's declaration that we have all been justified by grace to Luther's hammering his theses against the Wittenberg Church door to remind us that grace reigns supreme, the whole Reformation-thing was intended to tell us that, in the end, we don't need to do anything, earn anything, say anything, accomplish anything, or buy anything to earn God's love. That we already have it, and that most of the Church's problems – and, indeed, the world's problems – start when we forget we already have love and worth and dignity as a gift from God and try to earn it or take it from someone else.

It's about freedom.

Now, the Gospel. Yeah, the good news of what God has done in Christ for us and all the world. It's about freedom, too. From time to time, we might wonder what the biblical readings have to do with our lives today, and we might wonder if the words and deeds of the Reformers 500 years ago matter, but it's finally all about freedom. We are not trapped. No matter what we may have done, no matter what may have been done to us. None of these things define us. We are free and the future is open.

Look, I know that can be really, really hard to believe. Some of what's happened to us seems so huge, so important, so all-encompassing, but it's not. Not to say that these things don't matter. They do. Illness, disappointment, hurt, whatever. They matter and they may, in fact, be *descriptively* true of us. But they do not *define* us. Nothing we have done or

has been done to us captures who we are completely. Only one thing can do that: God, the creator and sustainer of all. And God has chosen to call us beloved children, holy and precious in God's sight. That's what defines us.

And so we are free. Free to risk and serve and help and care and try and struggle and laugh and all the rest. We are free, that is, to love, just as God loves us.

That's what all these readings are about. That's what our whole ministry is about – freedom. So, know that you are free and remember the importance of this 500th birthday of that knowledge. Free from your past, free from regret, free from fear, free from self-limitation, free from old hurts and mistakes. You are free. Hear it again. And come back next week to hear this same good news, because the world will often try to convince us otherwise and so the freedom that sets you free, well, it takes a little while to sink in.