

## John 8:31-36

"Happy Birthday!" Sorry that we do not have cake and ice cream and presents for you today, but for us who are Lutherans, today is our birthday nonetheless. We do not celebrate our birth in November when Martin Luther was born, or in February when he died. Reformation Day is the birth of the Lutheran Church. October 31st, 1517...because our church is not about Luther the man, but what God accomplished through him by grace.

If our church was about the man, Martin Luther, it might be a very strange church indeed. Luther, as a man, suffered from depression. Once when he was in a depressed mood for some time, his wife, Katie, came in to the room dressed in black. "Who died," asked Martin. "I thought God did," replied Katie, "from the way you have been acting." Martin Luther was also a very opinionated man. He had choice remarks about everyone. In the evening he drank beer brewed by his wife from a stein that had levels for the three main parts of the catechism. He scolded his friend Melanchthon because he could only drink down past the Ten Commandments to the Apostles' Creed, while Luther could reach the Lord's Prayer without stopping. Were we to celebrate Martin Luther the man today, we would have to, among other things, set up a beer tent.

But Reformation Day is about Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. He wanted to debate the scholars about the abominable practice of selling indulgences...God's people paying money for God's free forgiveness in Christ Jesus. It's all about grace! Luther proclaimed...and faith! Our works, what we give and what we do, do nothing to earn forgiveness and salvation from God. It's all about what God does for us in Jesus Christ as a gift.

That's our heritage. To the Lutherans of the Reformation it was all about Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone. And that's why we still celebrate the Reformation today. Not because we are so impressed with who Luther was, but because through him, God restored His truth to His church. More than anything that Luther did, he studied, he devoured the Word of God...and there he learned the truth of Christ. Jesus says in our text, "If you abide in My Word...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

For a long time Luther was not a free man. He was a slave to his fears. He was a slave to his sinfulness. He was even a slave to his anger toward God. God punishes sinners. I am a sinner. Therefore God must punish me! Luther lived as a slave to his fear of going to hell, and there was no freedom that anyone was giving to him. Until God in His Word released Luther's chains. "The righteous shall live by faith," he read over and over. Through such words God turned the key. Christ Jesus was punished in my place. Believing this, my sins are forgiven. It is not how I live; it is that Jesus lived and died for me.

Now it all made sense...Abraham, Moses, the giving of the Law, the cross of Christ, the Word, and the Sacraments of the Church. It's all about Jesus...not me, but my Savior. He doesn't show me how to live; He lives a holy life for me because my life is full of sin. He died an innocent death for me, and it is mine simply by faith in Him. Now I am free from the Law's accusations. As a Christian I keep the Law not because I have to, but because I want to. And God forgives me freely for Jesus' sake for every sin I do in thought, word, or deed. Now the Word and Sacraments are precious to me because through them God gives Jesus to me; through them He keeps me in the Faith and safeguards me from the evil one.

Friends, this was Luther. Can you see why we celebrate the Reformation still today? Can you see why we are thankful to be Lutherans...to hold to the same truths that God revealed to Luther in the pages of Scripture?

To be a Lutheran is a little like being in the king's army. Go back with me to the days of King Saul when they were at war with the Philistines, and at the front of the enemy's lines stood Goliath. A monster of a man. Nine feet high and strong as an ox. Now there's an idea for a Halloween costume-- dress up as Goliath. It would scare the daylights out of the "trick-or-treaters."

That was Saul's army...scared to death. They were, to a man, too weak, too puny. They shivered in their boots as Goliath challenged them to fight. Not one of them would have survived. They were slaves...slaves to their fear, slaves to the Philistines, slaves to Goliath. Until young David came, and with the swing of his sling he put a stone into the forehead of Goliath, and with Goliath's own sword, cut off his head. Now Saul's army was free...free from their fears, free from the Philistines, free to chase their enemy all the way back to their own country.

Was David a better warrior than everyone in Saul's army? No. Was he stronger than the other men in the army? No. Was he wiser in the knowledge of battle tactics? No. It's simply this...David's strength was in the Lord. He did not trust in sword and shield. He put his faith in his God.

And that was Luther. He was like young David fighting the enemy. Not with his logical mind, not with his own good works, but with the stone, the rock of Christ-- the Word of God. Luther slung that stone of God's Word at the church's practice of selling indulgences. He slung the stone of 'Christ alone' at the false belief that good works earn sinners a place in heaven. Luther slung God's Word at the head of Goliath, and the Reformation was born.

You and I are children of the Reformation. We are Saul's army. What God did through Luther gives us peace, and freedom from our enemies. We do not need to cower in fear of Goliath anymore. You know the truth...that God forgives sinners like you, not because of how you live, but because Jesus lived and died for you. Does the guilt of your past rise up like a Goliath in your conscience? Luther wrestled with the same monster. But now that Goliath is dead, the truth is that you are forgiven of every sin in your past. Jesus died for them all. And the truth shall set you free.

Does Goliath rise up before you with enormous doubts...wondering, hoping you will somehow get into heaven? Luther struggled with the same doubts. Am I good enough? Have I done enough? But Christ, working through Luther, cut off the Goliath head. Heaven is a gift. To Luther, and now to us, God reveals the truth. No one is declared justified by how they live; it is through faith alone. In Jesus eternal life is yours no matter how sinful you are. Trust in Him alone. By grace you are saved through faith in Christ.

So, dear Lutheran friends, how shall we live since we know the truth? Can we indulge in sin since God forgives us freely? Can we live how we please? Can we even live without regard for God's Word and Sacraments? Yes...you can live how you please; but Luther would ask you, "What pleases you, dear Christian?" Forgiven by a loving God, do you really want to give in, now, to your flesh? Given the truth of Jesus who lived and died for you, do you really want to despise Him by ignoring His Word and giving little attention to His Sacraments?

Once Saul's army was free of Goliath, they did not give themselves up to their enemy. They killed the Philistines. They chased them out of the land of Judah. And so for us. Christ has freed you from

your enemies. Your sins are forgiven. Death is defeated. Hell's powerful head is cut off. How can we, as Lutheran Christians who know the truth, live as if none of this ever happened? How can we give in to sin and Satan when these, our enemies, have been defeated? We have a Mighty Fortress. It's Jesus. Let's live in that Fortress so that, not only we, but our children's children know the truth of Christ which alone sets sinners free. Amen.