

John 8:31-36

Thursday evening as children scamper from house to house crying out, “Trick or Treat!” Lutherans will be gathered together in prayer thanking God for the Reformation. Right. The fact that we are celebrating the Reformation today, four days prior, is evidence that Halloween has won the battle for October 31st. But it is difficult to win a battle against children, cute costumes, and candy. Especially when you’re competing with a monk, some nails, and an old document.

The saying goes, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” So we will...in a sense. Halloween has evolved over time. Years ago it really was trick OR treat. If no treat was given, a nasty trick was played on the homeowner like throwing eggs at the house. That was back in the good ole days. Now it’s trunk or treat for many, during daylight hours, and not always on Halloween. I guess that one thing which has remained the same is that masks are usually worn to cover the face.

We do that. And not just on Halloween. We wear masks. Not hideous masks. Nice ones. Flattering ones. Masks that cover our true self and present us in the best possible light to others. I guess this is a good thing in a way. If we didn’t hide our real self from others, we would have few friends.

The problem with wearing a mask is when we fool ourselves. We start believing that we really are the mask we wear. Jesus deals with such as these in our text for today. He says, “*If you abide in My word...the truth will set you free.*” But these Jews are wearing a mask. Jesus can see through it, but they cannot. “*We are offspring of Abraham,*” they reply, “*and have never been enslaved to anyone!*” They really believe this. They look at themselves in a mirror, and it’s not the mask of a slave they see. “We’re no slaves,” they exclaim, “look at us; we don’t need to be set free from anything or anyone!”

But this mask is a lie. “*Everyone who commits sin,*” says Jesus, “*is a slave to sin.*” These Jews are sinners. They sin. And so they are slaves. Sin is their master.

Is it yours? I have both good news and bad news. Which one do you want to hear first? We’ll start with the good news. You were a slave to sin, but no more. “*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” And He did. The way it happened for you is the way it happened for Max this morning. Jesus delivered him from the power of sin, death, and the devil in Holy Baptism. Scripture testifies to this truth. Read Romans 6. It’s all about being baptized into Christ. “*We have been united with (Christ)...*” it says, “*...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*”

This is good news. Sin is not your master. Then who is? The one who set you free from sin: Jesus. This means that you do not ever have to obey sin. You are freed from its rule over you. You can tell sin where to go. Yeah, really.

But do you? Do I? Now comes the bad news...Romans 7. “*I do not do what I want; but I do the very thing I hate.*” St. Paul is speaking here. “*So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me...Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?*”

Paul here is a baptized Christian. And yet sin often has its way with him. He bemoans the fact that sin, though not his master, still is able to master him.

But one thing here is good. Paul does not wear a mask. He does not cry, “I’m no slave to sin!” Rather, he cries, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free?*”

You and I need to do what Paul does here and remove our mask. “*We only deceive ourselves,*” writes the Apostle John, “*if we say we have no sin.*” We are hideous, wretched sinners. It’s our condition. Sometimes this comes out by the way we act toward others. Usually we just hide it.

We’re weak, you and I, and we often give in to sin. But Jesus is not weak. He defeated sin for you in your baptism, and He continues to fight for you today. The power of your baptism into Christ never stops working. Every day your baptism is effectively at work in you to defeat sin in your life.

The devil lies to you,” You’re a slave to sin; look at all the bad things you do!” But your baptism is your daily reminder, “Don’t believe him! You are joined to Christ Jesus. He set you free from the power of sin.”

Friend, this is why Jesus died on the cross for you. He became sin there to defeat it. He allowed sin to enslave Him so that you are set free.

Yes, you still sin. So do I. We don’t want to, as with St. Paul, but we are weak. But Jesus remains your Master, just as He remains your God, your Lord, your Savior.

Maybe you lost some battles with sin last week. But Jesus won the war for you. Your sin cannot defeat you. It cannot send you to hell. You’re forgiven. Not just those of you who are church members, or who are faithful church members. You are all forgiven. Every last one of you. Jesus defeated sin for all of you. His promise is for each and every one of you, “*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” Amen.