

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Reformation

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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

You are mine.

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

“We are Abraham’s descendants,” they answered, “and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be set free’?”

Jesus answered, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin. But a slave does not remain in the family forever. A son does remain forever. So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.”

—John 8:31-36

What is truth? That was an intriguing question that Pontius Pilate asked. Jesus stood before him on trial. Jesus said, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here.”**

“You are a king then?” Pilate asked.

Jesus answered, “I am, as you say, a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

“What is truth?” Pilate said to him. (John 18:36-38 EHV).

Pilate’s question has been the question people have asked for millennia. What is truth? 1500 years later, Pilate’s question became a burning question even in Martin Luther’s life. What is truth? Luther experienced one truth that was so real in his life. No matter how much he tried, he could not appease his conscience. His conscience bothered him relentlessly. Luther knew a truth. Oh, he tried to ignore it. He tried to appease it. He tried to do good works to make up for it. He worked his hardest to relieve God’s thumb that was pressing down on his soul. But no matter what he did, he came back to the same deep-seeded truth. He felt it deep in his being. There was nothing he could do to make things right with God. He once said:

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach (in other words, he did everything right), I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love ... yes, I hated the righteous God who punished sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God.... Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.”

Have you been there? Oh, a lot of people think that sin is no big deal. A lot of people are convinced that they are truly free when they can do whatever they want and however they want. But Jesus’ words strike a loud refrain: **“Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin”** (John 8:34 EHV). But when we are about to give in to sin again, we don’t believe his words. We don’t think they are true. We think, “How could that be true? The act seems so innocent. So harmless. Nobody would know. It looks like fun. It is enticing. It promises exhilarating freedom.” And during the moment? Oh, it is great, isn’t it? Isn’t that what sin does? It makes you feel so good. It gives you just what you thought you wanted. You can do anything. You are free!

But that is a lie. It’s not freedom. Sin handcuffs you. You look down and you see an orange jumpsuit covering your life. What has just happened has happened before. That evil slave master has you in his shackles once again. It drags you from place to place bringing guilt upon your conscience. Jesus is right. **“Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin”** (John 8:34 EHV).

Do you see yourself there? Look down. Do you see the handcuffs? Do you see the orange jumpsuit marking you as a criminal, enslaved? We don’t like to admit it. Rather, we try to justify it. Everybody else was doing it, too. She deserved those remarks. He had it coming to him. It was just a little fun.

But the slave master doesn’t care. He will call you names. “Filth. Low-life. Refuse. You are despicable.” And you know he’s right. Your conscience bears it. **“Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin”** (John 8:34 EHV). That is truth!

No matter how many times we try to ignore it or appease it, that truth hangs over our heads. Sin enslaves. Our conscience nags. Martin Luther experienced it, and so do we.

But something changed for Luther, and it has changed for us. He studied the Bible, and the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the truth. He studied God’s truth. And Jesus set him free. This is truth. This is the very essence of Christianity. **“God reached down not halfway to meet us in our vileness but all the way down, to the foul dregs of our broken humanity. And this holy and loving God dared to touch our lifeless and rotting essence and in doing so underscored that this is the truth about us. In fact, we are not sick and in need of healing. We are dead and in**

need of resurrecting. We are not dusty and in need of a good dusting; we are fatally befouled with death and fatally toxic filth and require total redemption” (Metaxas).

What is truth? I am a filthy sinner who can do nothing to get out of the slimy slammer. But in the darkness of my cell, my Jesus came to save.

That Jesus suspended above the earth on the torture tool of the cross, that Jesus is not you. God says, “I chose, he chose, we chose this. He would endure the wrath. He would suffer the agony. He would do the time. Not you. Through faith in him, you are free. You are released. You are not guilty. Not guilty. Not guilty.”

As much as sin wants to take a hold on you and claim you as its slave, Jesus says, “**You are MINE.** I will not let you go. You are my family, God’s son, God’s daughter.”

And you look down and instead of an orange jumpsuit, you see a white robe. Christ’s righteousness given to you through faith. Instead of hands being bound, they are free. The evil taskmaster of sin has no hold on you. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you are righteous, right with God now, and right with him on the day you die. That means you are close to God, part of his family, his son, his daughter. **God says, “You are MINE.”**

It’s as Jesus said. “**If the Son sets you free, you really will be free.**” And because of that, Jesus words have a direct impact on our lives. You have to really think about the kind of impact Jesus’ words have on you. Jesus says, “**If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**”

Think about what Jesus has put in front of us. There is truth. And Jesus’ truth changes the way you think. How does it make you think about your own soul? “**If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples.**” What teaching am I allowing to reside in here? What teaching do I have going through my head day in and day out? Whose is it? And where did it come from? Is it truth or is it something else? Is it my own teaching? Is it the world’s teaching? Does it come from God or from Satan?

What Jesus says changes the way I view my family. I see my dear wife who is faithful in worship week in and week out. She sits in the pew with the kids. She listens. She worships. She soaks in the gospel. But I want to check in with her every day through the week. I want to know what she is thinking about. I want to know how she is processing life. What is going through her head and her heart? Is it Jesus’ teaching?

I have the same responsibility to my children. It’s called being a Christian parent. Anybody else can put clothes on their backs and food on the table. God has called me to be a *Christian* parent. What does it say to my kids if I don’t daily remind them that they are the children of God? Do I daily remind them that God says, “You are mine?” What message am I giving to them if I don’t speak about or share Jesus’ teaching with them at home but simply send them to Lutheran schools? Would I give the impression that I am wiping my hands of their Christian faith and I’ll let someone else take care of that?

You see, when Jesus says these words, it forces me to think about my soul and every single relationship I have with others. “**If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples.**” Do I care about that for myself? Do I care about that for the people in my life?

The truth is I do. The truth is I want the truth and I want to remain in that truth. The truth is I want the same for all the people in my life. The truth is this is why we hold to *sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone. God’s Word is truth.

I’m sure many of you know that for Martin Luther God’s Word, education, and music were very important to him in his life. In 1523 Martin Luther wrote the hymn “Dear Christians, one and all rejoice.” He wanted to teach the truth through music. This is what he wrote.

**Fast bound in Satan’s chains I lay;
Death brooded darkly over me.
Sin was my torment night and day;
In sin my mother bore me.
Yet deep and deeper still I fell;
Life had become a living hell.
So firmly sin possessed me.**

Handcuffed, shackled, bound in an orange jumpsuit. But the horror became worse.

**My own good works availed me naught,
No merit they attaining;
My will against God’s judgment fought,
No hope for me remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left naught but death to be my share
And hell to be my sentence.**

Guilty. Guilty. Guilty. The verdict is made. It is so clear. We can do nothing to free ourselves.

But the initiative of deliverance does not come from us.

**But God beheld my wretched state
Before the world's foundation,
And, mindful of his mercies great,
He planned my soul's salvation.
A Father's heart he turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently;
He gave his dearest treasure.**

**He spoke to his beloved Son:
"It's time to have compassion.
Then go, bright Jewel of my crown,
And bring mankind's salvation.
From sin and sorrow set them free;
Slay bitter death for them that they
May live with you forever."**

**The Son obeyed his Father's will,
Was born of virgin mother,
And, God's good pleasure to fulfill,
He came to be my brother.
No garb of pomp or power he wore;
A servant's form like mine he bore
To lead the devil captive.**

Then in his hymn, Jesus speaks to us:

**To me he spoke, "Hold fast to me –
I am your rock and castle.
Your ransom I myself will be;
For you I strive and wrestle.
For I am yours, your friend divine,
And evermore *you shall be mine*;
The foe shall not divide us.**

**"The foe shall shed my precious blood,
Me of my life bereaving.
All this I suffer for your good;
Be steadfast and believing.
Life shall from death the victory win;
My innocence shall bear your sin,
And you are blest forever.**

**"Now to my Father I depart,
The Holy Spirit sending
And, heavenly wisdom to impart,
My help to you extending.
He will a source of comfort be,
Teach you to know and follow me,
And in all truth will guide you.**

**"What I on earth have lived and taught
Be all your life and teaching;
So shall my kingdom's work be wrought
And honored in your preaching.
Take care that no one's man-made laws
Should ever destroy the gospel's cause.
This final word I leave you."**

No more fear. No more handcuffs. No more orange jumpsuit. No more death sentence. You have been set free. God says, "**You are mine.**" Jesus has set you free. You are now free to live the way God made you to be: his child forever. My friends, that is truth! Amen.