

Jn. 8: 31 – 36, Reformation Sunday
Haven Lutheran, Oct. 28, 2018

(Please note that this sermon is an approximation of what I preached. Whole paragraphs that I threw out have been deleted, at least some of what I added has been put into print, and some of the material that is worthwhile, but got left out, is retained. May this continue to speak God's word to You! Pastor Chris Ramsey)

My faith that Pastor Linda had a better children's sermon than the one I had in my head has proven to be correct. Now, all I have to do is preach this sermon on Reformation Sunday, on this Sunday, the day after eleven worshippers were murdered at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh; on this Sunday, after a week of alarming violence.

It is easy for us to see the murderous man in Pittsburgh as someone who is a slave to sin. The person who sends pipe bombs in the mail is a slave to sin, even if they are mentally deranged. That seems to be obvious.

Of course, you and I aren't slaves to sin. I just want the candidates I vote for to win. I want this nation to have all the variety in people and opinions that are tolerable to me. I want Lutheran Christianity to thrive, grow and change with this changing world, even if I have a sneaking suspicion that God prefers the old green hymnal! Can you see the chains of sin in which I've wrapped myself? None of these things sound evil or wicked, and yet they all fit Luther's definition of sin. Sin is when we are "curved in upon ourselves."

When we are curved in on ourselves, we see the world only from our point of view from what we want. It's "my way or the highway!" God's Word for us and about us is no longer in our hearts and heads. Did you hear the folks in Jesus' audience who objected to his statement that the truth of his Word would "make them free?" **"We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone."** Really? Aren't they forgetting that little unpleasantness in Pharaoh's Egypt? And how about those Roman soldiers marching down the street!

In their self-centered memory, Jesus' listeners forgot how God powerfully freed them from slavery in Egypt. The freedom Jesus offers is to continue, to live in God's Word that reminds us how God has freed us from sin through Jesus Christ.

The Son makes us free indeed by freeing us from the sin that would curve us in on ourselves. We don't belong to ourselves, we belong to God! Baptism is our transfer of ownership from rebellion and separation from God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to rock-solid-beloved children of God. There's joy in that!

Jesus comes to reconcile sinners to God and to each another. On the cross, he stretched out his arms across all the aisles that divide us from God and from one-another. With his free mercy and love he forgives our sins and gives us another chance and the promise of eternal life. Some of our Christian friends think that we have to be good enough to deserve God's grace. God gives Lutheran followers of Jesus our special voice, faithful to God's word: It is by grace that we have been set free, not by our own works.

I close with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther: **“God is still wise and mighty enough to know very well how to sustain His church without the help of the world and the devil. Therefore the challenge: As you please devil; come on with all your henchmen; Christ will not only continue to exist in spite of you but will finally crush your head.”** Amen!!