

Oct. 27, 2002
Reformation Sunday
John 8:31-36

Goal – Joyful obedience

Malady – Taking offense, trusting in one's heritage, anything that shackles us

Means – God's undeserved love, "grace alone"

This lesson describes the word of Jesus to believers, not to the Pharisees this time, but to those Jews who believed in Jesus. "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

Famous words, these two sentences of our Lord's. They are reminiscent of Jesus calling himself "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 6:34). To know the truth is not to know the facts about a subject, but to know Jesus Christ. To know the truth is not a matter of words but a matter of living a life of faith. To do the truth leads to knowing the truth. We can see this repeatedly just in the Gospel of John.

1. People believed Jesus when they saw what he did – John 2:23
2. Whoever does the truth will come to the light (of truth) – John 3:21
3. Jesus claimed that the reason he came was to do the will of his Father – John 4:34
4. "What I do, that is, the deeds my father gave me to do, these speak on my behalf and prove that the Father has sent me" John 5:36 (TEV)
5. "If anyone does the will of the Father he will know the will of God" John 7:17 (RSV), or "Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know..." (TEV), or "If you really want to obey God you will know if what I teach comes from God" (CEV)

Doing leads to knowing. The Jewish believers insisted on their claim to be free, based on their ancestry, based on their knowledge as charter members of the Jewish faith.

But that doesn't cut it. You can be in bondage even when you are rich in money, knowledge or heritage, or you can live by grace alone and be free. Our heritage can set us free, or it can be our bondage. God's Word, said Luther, can set us free.

God asks joyful obedience of us. We joyfully obey God in a variety of ways in each of our circumstances. God sets the example of loving with a joyful heart: "I did command them to obey me, so that I would be their God and they would be my people" (Jeremiah 7:23, TEV). It is by grace alone that God loves us. It is by grace alone that we do what God wants, and it is a grace that is evident in our doing God's will.

The truth sets us free because we are justified by grace through faith, without the deeds of the law, without our ancestry, without our congregational membership. It is grace alone. It is a grace that is reflected in our lives, reflected in what we do to the glory of God, reflected in what we give to the

glory of God with joyful hearts.

Our stewardship response is joyful obedience, gladly following Jesus out of love for God. We gladly look for more opportunities to give more and more of ourselves, a reflection of grace alone.

Look for opportunities to give as God has joyfully given us unconditional love, by grace alone.

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