

John 8:31-36

“I Tell You The Truth...Anyone Who Sins Is a Slave to Sin”

Ash Wednesday

March 6, 2019

Our Redeemer

Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction: Truth is...]

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

“You will not surely die.” It’s been thousands of years since the devil spoke those words in Eden. But his language has always remained the same: lie, lie, lie. Sometimes he shouts it. Sometimes he whispers it. Sometimes he speaks with such a natural, monotone voice that we don’t even suspect a thing. But he is always speaking.

Here are a few examples of the lies the devil tells us: “You’re your own boss . . . you can have it all . . . you’re worthless . . . no one loves you . . . that’s unforgiveable . . . that was a cultural thing, not God’s will.”

We live in a world where the devil’s dialect of lies is spoken all around us. That’s why it is so important for us to listen to the voice of the One who is the Truth.

As we walk with our Savior in his Word over the next six weeks, we’ll see him suffer, we’ll see him die, and we’ll see him rise again. But we’ll also hear him speak. And as we listen, we’ll hear him repeatedly assure us by saying, “I tell you the truth.”

[...We Were Slaves to Sin]

Of course, the truth is not what we always want to hear. We don’t want to hear that our favorite pair of jeans are getting a little too tight. We don’t want to hear that the girl or guy we’re dating is a bad influence on us. And we never want to hear that we made a mistake at work.

Too often, the truth makes us feel uncomfortable. It exposes our flaws and opens us up to criticism. Maybe that explains why our defenses go up when Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” It’s one thing to admit that I

sin, but as soon as Jesus says that I'm a slave to sin, I feel weak and helpless. I feel like I am not in control of my life. But it's the truth, isn't it?

Frederick Douglass, a freed slave who turned abolitionist once wrote, "I didn't know I was a slave until I found out I couldn't do the things I wanted." As Christians, what do we want to do? We certainly don't want to sin. Can we not sin? No. By nature we're slaves. We may live in the land of the free, but by nature we are slaves to sin.

The devil does his best to feed us more lies and convince us that being slaves to sin is no big deal. We hear his voice when we think, "It's okay if I sin a little here and there. After all, Jesus has already taken care of it for me, right?" We hear his voice when we think, "I'm not that bad of a sinner. Look at all the good things I've done." The devil tells us these lies and more to get us to downplay our sin and to make us feel comfortable in it.

And let's face it. It's not hard to make us feel comfortable living in our sin. What makes us uncomfortable is when we are confronted with the truth that our sin has consequences. Jesus says, "The slave does not remain in the house forever." He is warning that a slave to sin has no room reserved in heaven. As slaves to sin, we have no place in God's kingdom. Instead, we deserve eternal punishment.

We can handle facing the truth that we're sinners. But to be told we deserve hell, that's tougher to swallow. But that's the truth. And quite frankly, that's what Ash Wednesday is about: to lead us to come to grips with the truth of what God told Adam way back in Genesis, "Dust you are and to dust you will return" (Ge 3:19). As slaves to sin, we deserve to die. As slaves to sin, we deserve hell.

[...We Were Freed from Sin]

What's the escape plan? How do we pull a Harry Houdini and escape these chains? How do we get freedom?

You've heard the old saying, "It's not so much what you know, but whom you know." The key to freedom is knowing the One who holds the key to release your chains. That one person is Jesus. As the Son of God, he holds in his hands the keys to eternal life. He himself says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

So the question now becomes, how do we get to know this person who has the keys to our freedom? Jesus says, “If you hold to [or literally, if you remain in] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

This teaching is the key that Jesus uses to unlock the shackles of sin.

This teaching shows us a Jesus who didn't just feel sorry for us when he saw us being beaten and whipped by our sin, but a Jesus who stepped in and took the beating for us.

This teaching shows a Jesus who didn't get knocked out by sin when he stepped in our place, but a Jesus who stormed back from the grave, thus signing and sealing our emancipation proclamation.

This teaching, which tells us the truth of Jesus, sets us free.

And because we've been freed from the shackles of sin and our condemnation under the law, we are now also free to serve God and one another in love. By nature, that is something we alone could not do. Our sinful nature only wants to serve ourselves.

As sinners, we crave things like sexual immorality, hatred, discord, envy, drunkenness, and the like. But our enslavement to sin, which curved our hearts in on ourselves, is over. We aren't bound to serve ourselves anymore. Rather, our new freed self is equipped and motivated to live for God.

The Holy Spirit equips us to live lives of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (*Gal 5:22*) We are free to carry other people's burdens just as Jesus carried ours. Free to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us. Free to serve others as Jesus became a servant for us. We are free to live in the truth of Jesus' Word.

It's true that we once were slaves to sin. And the power of sin is the law. But now the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts, and we are doing things against which there is no law. Sin is no longer your master. So don't believe the lies of the devil. The Son has set you free, and you are free to live for him today. You are free

to live with him forever. Jesus promises to give you forgiveness of sins in His Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. And when he speaks these words of promise to you, he tells you the truth. Amen.

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
