

The Festival of the Reformation (transferred)
30 October, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear saints of God,

The freedom that all men seek and need will not be found through debate or legislation or treaties or wars. It is found only in the Gospel - in the death of the Son of God who died the death of God's wrath against sin that all people might be forgiven. This forgiveness frees you from the eternal guilt of your sin, the terror of death, and the power of the Old Evil Foe. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, can grant that freedom. And only that freedom can bring peace between men. The freedom of Christ is not for sale. You cannot earn it with your works. You can't buy it or gain it from the saints who have gone before you. It is not something you simply assume is true of all people because God is nice. It is a gift that God gives only to repentant sinners through His Word because He is merciful. It cost God the Father the most precious thing to Him - His Son. Christ Jesus has died for you so that you might be free, so that the iron gates of hell's prison might be shattered forever. And this priceless treasure belongs to all who believe this good news that is proclaimed to them, all who receive in faith the work that Christ Jesus has done.

This is always our cause for joy in even the darkest, most painful, most trying times of our lives. Whether we are going about our daily business, watching the markets and increasing inflation with bated breath, or sitting imprisoned because we bear the name of Christ, we are free. We are free from having to fear what men and the world seek to do us because they really can't do anything no matter how hard they try or what terrible threats they scream at us. We are free from having to live according to the desires of our flesh because the Lord has shown us how destructive those desires really are and that freedom is found in living according to our God-given vocations. We are free from chasing after the fleeting and empty things that the world believes are so precious and important - fame, success, wealth, popularity, health, ease. These are just vanities, a chasing after the wind we hunt down at the cost of our soul.

You, the Baptized, have been set free. The chains of sin that bound you to eternal judgment were forever broken when the Lord Jesus who shouted "It is finished!"

burst forth from the tomb in triumph. The filth and guilt of your sin have been forever washed away in the baptismal waters. You have been promised the daily and eternal love of God the Father Almighty. You have been given the Holy Spirit who has breathed into you new life, new strength, new hope, and new powers. These are not conditional gifts. They have been poured out to you as abundantly as the Blood of Jesus poured out of His sacred veins. Your Baptism is an eternal fountain of forgiveness and peace. It will not run out. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No one can take this treasure from you. It is only yours to throw away. Neither man, nor devil, nor angel are able to take it away from you. And the Lord Jesus Christ who bestowed this freedom upon you will never go back on His promises. The Son has set you free!

You alone can refuse this gift. You alone can reject what Jesus has done for you. You alone can deny your Savior by imagining that the promise is unsure or insufficient for your sin or that it is somehow contingent upon your own efforts to reform yourself. You alone can give up your freedom and bind yourself again to slavery by unrepentance and continuing to walk in the ways of the flesh as though children of light have been freed to continue walking in works of darkness. You can trade this freedom for the slavery of false Gods like politicians, more days of life on this earth, higher paying jobs, and popularity. You can set aside the help of God by not calling out to Him in prayer. You can enjoy the love of the world by accepting its deranged definitions of man, of love, and of truth. You can deny the mercy of Christ by imagining that you have no sin and that you're a good person. You can pretend as though the devil and the world aren't actively seeking out the eternal destruction of both you and your children and allow them unfettered access to your eyes and your ears, your hearts and minds. You can follow the vain and foolish imaginations of your flesh and your reason by refusing to read and study and learn the true heavenly wisdom of Holy Scripture.

You are free to do all those things. And, to be sure. Those things are easier. You will not suffer the judgment or mockery or hatred of the world. They will praise you and lavish you with all their love. You are free to travel down that broad and easy road. God does not force His love and salvation upon you. But know that "freedom" is slavery. It is death. It brings with it only the wrath and punishment of God. It may not be immediate. God, in His mercy, is patient, always seeking repentant sinners. The eternal Gospel continues to be proclaimed down to this very day. But the time of patience will run out. The day is surely drawing near which Jesus, God's anointed, in all His power shall appear as Judge whom God appointed. And on that day, those who loved their slavery and their sin will receive for all eternity the fruits of their unbelief and rebellion. They will suffer the eternal

judgment and torment of hell, where there will not ever be a drop of God's mercy to relieve them.

Children of God, washed in the Blood of the Lord Jesus, freed from Satan's tyranny and given a seat at the banquet table of God's righteousness, do not trade your freedom for such slavery. Do not chase after false gods who will only lead you to death. Do not be led astray by the world's lies, lies that it has received straight from the ancient serpents lying mouth. What we preach and you believe IS utter foolishness to the world. That was true in Noah's day, in Isaiah's day, in Jesus' day, and it is still true today. But the foolishness of Jesus' cross, that which we preach, is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. It is the narrow door and the difficult path. But it is the path to eternal life. The Son, God's Son, has set you free. He has loosed the bonds of your guilt and He has flung wide the prison doors of judgment. You are free.

The glorious Gospel, proclaimed first in Eden, preserved by God through the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and evangelists remains. And this day, again, your gracious Savior invites you to rest in the true faith that He has done EVERYTHING necessary to save you. The all-sufficient Blood of Jesus, Blood which Jesus offers as true, life-giving drink, has set you free. By His Word the Son of God has loosed your bonds so that you may have true and eternal life. And all who repent of their sin and unbelief, no matter how far or often they have strayed, will find in Christ the peace and freedom which surpasses all human understanding.

This peace cannot ever be found in works of the Law. The Lord clearly says through the apostle "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin". God Himself unequivocally says we will not be justified before Him by anything we do. Therefore, if you comfort yourself with your own goodness or obedience whether you measure that by God's or man's law, the truth is a simple one - you will not be justified. No one can be because sinful man can only find one thing in the mirror of the law - failure. The law doesn't make us guilty, it exposes the ugly truth that we are - every last one of us. Jesus plainly says "Anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." No one can escape that sentence. No one can claim moral superiority because all have fallen short of the glory of the one who can - God Himself who is judge. He alone is good. He alone is holy. And if we believe that we can stand safely before His judgment seat then we are fools who have been blinded by the devil.

It is this delusion that lies at the heart of all false teaching - that man is capable of justifying himself before God by works done of his own power. This is a vicious and demonic lie sown in the world by the devil and spread by his apostles to lead people away from the gracious salvation which God has prepared in Christ Jesus for all who believe and bind them in the slavery of death. And it is a wonderfully effective lie because it glorifies man and there is nothing man loves more than to be glorified, to think great things about himself. We love to boast about the good we have done, the sacrifices we have made, the hours and the money we have given and we imagine that these help us in God's sight, demonstrating how worthy we are of his love and favor.

But God hates these things when we offer them in place of the sacrifice of His Son. It is an offense to say that something we have done could replace or be equated to the death of Jesus for us. We have nothing to boast of, not according to our works. Our works, even the best of them, bring with them our guilt and our unbelief. They are not done in pure faith, with a pure trust in God and love for our neighbor. Chasing after enough good works to calm your conscience is an impossible task that will lead you either to false hope or the darkest depths of despair.

Righteousness is something that must be bestowed upon us by the only one who is righteous. And precisely in bestowing forgiveness and salvation upon sinners, is God's true righteousness seen. He doesn't owe us this salvation for any reason. We did nothing to merit the death of God's Son under God's judgment against our sin. Yet God, in His mercy, freely gave that very gift, the only means by which we could be set free from eternal judgment. What is pleasing to God is to receive this gift in faith - to believe that God has done exactly as He has promised, that He has paid the entirety of your debt that you may be free and that He has granted to you the adoption of sons through the waters of Holy Baptism.

This is true freedom. This is the freedom to which God has called you in Christ Jesus. This is the eternal Gospel that will continue to be preached until the day our Lord returns to bestow upon all the faithful the kingdom which He has prepared for us. This is the mighty fortress behind whose impenetrable walls you may take refuge as you await that glorious day when your Savior will return and cast away sin, death, and the devil forever and you with all of God's people will enjoy His perfect peace and unveiled presence for all eternity.

You are free, beloved Baptized of God, because the Son has set you free. By His almighty and life-giving Word He has declared you righteous, forgiven of all your

sins. May our gracious Lord keep you steadfast in this Word and the freedom which He has mercifully bestowed upon you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understand keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.