

John 8:31-36, 2015

³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:31-36, 2015

On my day off last Monday I jumped in the car and headed out to run some errands and got about a mile from home by the time I realized I had left my cell phone at home.

My knee jerk reaction was to turn around and go home to get it, but I paused a moment and suddenly experienced this great freedom by not having it with me,

and I was on my way down the road.

I had some time off the grid, unreachable, and it felt good!

You know, I remember life before cell phones and there is a part of me that likes to get it back every now and then.

I like to free myself from the expectations of being available all the time for just a little bit of time every now and then.

There is a sense of freedom that comes with it.

For a little while I was not a slave to my cell phone and everything that comes with it,

and I don't mean just church stuff so please don't read anything about being your pastor into what I have just said.

Being your pastor is what I am called to, want to do and love to do.

Freedom means something different to each person here today, and if you can describe what it looks and feels like to you then you can get some insight into what enslaves you.

Like I said it isn't going to be the same for everyone.

I am sure that the younger people here would not agree with my sentiment about my cell phone.

For most of them, they don't know what it is like to be without one.

Rather than thinking about the freedom of getting away by not having a cell, they experience being cut off by not having one:

Cut off from friends, their social circles and they experience feelings of being alone and isolation by not having a cell.

Young people actually find freedom in having a cell phone.

So I ask, what does freedom look like to you? What is that experience like? What does it feel like?

Jesus clearly talks about freedom in our gospel passage.

This is probably one of the most recognizable passages in scripture, and perhaps part of the reason for that is it comes up in our lectionary 2 to 3 times every year.

Jesus tells us that freedom is found in the truth of the word He speaks,

So, what is the truth Jesus speaks of?

As I have reflected over the last days, the last months, my time in ministry and my own life experiences I have been led to conclude that Jesus' truth is found in His words of love and grace,

- His call to follow,
- His call to confession, forgiveness, and repentance,
- His call to live in relationship with Him and with one another.

You may wonder, "How can following someone else in any way lead to freedom? Aren't you still subject to someone else?"

In my devotions for this morning was an excerpt from, *With Head and Heart: the Autobiography of Howard Thurman*.

Howard Thurman was born and raised in Daytona Beach. He turned down a medical education to follow his calling and became a prominent theologian, and activist professing that activism is to be "...rooted in faith, guided by the spirit and maintained in peace."¹

¹ http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/howard_thurman.html

In 1949 he authored *Jesus and the Disinherited* which provided an interpretation of the New Testament gospels that laid the foundation for the nonviolent civil rights movement.

In my devotion as he describes his understanding of his vocation and how he came to it He talks about His relationship with God. He writes this:

I prayed to God, I talked to Jesus. He was a companion. There was no felt need in my spirit to explain this companionship. There never has been. God was a reality. Jesus was a fact. From my earliest memories, Jesus was religious subject rather than religious object. It was Jesus with whom I talked as I sat under my oak tree fingering the bruises and scars of my childhood. Such was the pre-theological ground for me when both life and time spread out before me.

The older I have grown, the more it is clear that what I needed to hold me to my path was the sure knowledge that I was committed to a single journey with but a single goal—a way toward life. In formal and religious terms this meant for me the disclosure of the Will of God. And from this flowed an inescapable necessity: to be totally involved.

What I observe here is Thurman's freedom from the distractions, temptations and judgments of the world, some of which are not harmful like a medical degree and vocation,

freedom from the perceptions of need the world creates in each of us,

to engage God in the relationship he was called to without apology or making excuses for it, with the courage and devotion of one fully committed to his holy calling.

He was freed by the word of truth spoken by Jesus.

Now, not everyone is going to have the experience Thurman had, or the calling, or have an impact on the world as he did.

But, you each can live every bit as faithful a life with Jesus, you can hear and follow His calling,

and rather than perceiving it as chains of bondage live in that relationship and allow it to fill your life.

The other expression of freedom I mentioned comes through relationship with others.

God sent several people to me this week to remind me again how we experience freedom in our lives and in relationship with others through the truth spoken by Jesus.

and it is that word of truth that strengthens us and gives us courage to deal with illness, disease, and disability particularly when healing may only be partial or temporary.

It is Jesus' word of truth that calls us to freedom through confession when you hurt others,

 forgiveness when you are hurt by others,

 and repentance, turning from those things in the world that hold you captive toward the God who sets you free.

It is the power of God's Word that speaks the truth that God, no matter how you suffer, is with you.

Paul writes;

 "...for the whole creation is subjected to futility...in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Paul speaks of a future glory but he speaks words of truth and faith.

 He speaks words that offer courage and encouragement in the certainty of God's presence today and forever more.

Our spirits are fed and we are strengthened by Jesus' word of truth that comes to us in the words of institution at Holy Communion;

Take and eat, this is my body... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

On the outside it is sometimes a small thing that enslaves you, or that you may believe sets you free, like a cell phone that has an off switch and an on switch.

Sometimes it is the larger demands of life that enslave you.

On the inside it can be the suffering of illness, the hurts of broken relationships,

the miss-spoken word, loss, grief, depression or a broken spirit that holds you captive.

Or it could be that calling from God that won't let go of you until you answer.

It might be well on this Reformation Commemoration to remember what Martin Luther says, about freedom in his treatise on Christian Liberty called *The Freedom of a Christian*.

The outer person is the part of you that has a desire and yearning for freedom met from outside;

it is the body, the part that has all its needs and desires fulfilled from the outside.

The inner person is the soul, the part of you whose needs and desires are spiritual,

they live in you.

Luther says that,

“...no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude...One thing, and only one thing, is necessary...That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says...in John 8:36 ‘So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’”