

## Lessons for Reformation Sunday

### John 8:31-36

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." <sup>33</sup>They 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'?"

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

### Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; <sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah <sup>4</sup>There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. <sup>5</sup>God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. <sup>6</sup>The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. <sup>7</sup>The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

<sup>8</sup>Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. <sup>9</sup>He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup>"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."

<sup>11</sup>The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

### Jeremiah 31:31-34

<sup>31</sup>The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

## *John 8:31-36, Reformation Sunday 2016*

There is kind of a red line that runs through these lessons for this weekend that speaks to the relationship we have with God.

In fact they clearly speak to knowing God

When you read through our lessons you hear the Psalmist say: "...be still and know that I am God..."

There is a certain peace that is not only called for but granted in these words,

and resignation to God, a reliance and trust in God to grant that peace.

You hear the Prophet Jeremiah speak of the new covenant God will make with the people of Israel saying to them;

With this new promise,

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be my people... they will know the Lord;"

And John tells us in the gospel lesson, "continue in my word and you will be my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

These lessons all have something else in common. Each one of them resides, or originates from a context of stress, fear and anxiety.

Listen to Psalm 46.

...though the earth be changed...mountains shake...waters roar and foam...mountains tremble...nations are in an uproar...kingdoms totter...bows are broken, spears shattered and shields burned, God says,

be still, and know that I am God.

Jeremiah speaks to a people who have been conquered, displaced, deported, enslaved, who are in exile. They have lost hope, not only in their future, but in their God whom they believe loves them no longer.

He gives the people a new message of hope and promise.

“I will be their God and they will be my people... they will know the Lord.”

Our gospel reading for today comes to us from the midst of all kinds of tension, fear and anxiety about this man who has come with a new message and is turning the whole religious community upside down.

The woman caught in adultery was dragged before Jesus just before this passage by men expecting Him to give the command to stone her as the law required  
and Jesus says, You who are without sin cast the first stone.

The crowds were beginning to believe Jesus is the Messiah and the Pharisees and temple leaders were becoming afraid of the power he had over the people, and their fear and anxiety will only be relieved finally in Jesus' death which they are already planning.

Continue in my word and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

Is it true then that it is in the anxiety of life,  
living in a world that is out of your control, where wars rage,  
where earthquakes shake the ground,  
where hurricanes make the seas foam as they devastate  
lives and property with wind and flood waters,  
that God's word brings peace, comfort, healing and restoration?

What we notice though is that God's Word does not stop the war, keep the earth from shaking, or the winds from blowing or waters from flooding.

But the gospel claims that the word will set us free--  
free from what then?

Jesus, in this conversation that our gospel lesson is a part of, has told and demonstrated for the scribes, Pharisees and people who have come to believe in him

that each and every one lives in sin and is in need of forgiveness.

He tells them he is the light of the world and tells them about his relationship with the Father,

And they ask, "Who are you Jesus?"

As he spoke many did come to believe and to those who still don't believe he says,

"You do not understand because you cannot accept my word."

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

These are the texts assigned for this 499<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reformation.

It was in October of 1517 that Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Castle church.

His "95 Theses," put forward two central beliefs

that the Bible, the word of God, is the central religious authority

and that humans may reach salvation only by their faith and not by their deeds—and this sparked the Protestant Reformation.

In the next year we will begin to observe the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the reformation in earnest.

We will be planning studies of the Small Catechism especially during Lent next year, and other events as a part of this observance.

It will be a great time to share the story of Jesus with others in the community in a non-threatening way.

After all it is a discussion about history isn't it?

Our children learn about the Reformation in public school.

On Reformation Sunday of 2017 we will observe the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.

We can have some fun, learn and share with others in the coming year.

Martin Luther spent the rest of his life studying, teaching, preaching and writing so that the laity of the church as well as pastors, bishops and others might know what he learned about God.

Later in the reformation Luther wrote in his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* about the freedom of the soul:

“no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, ...One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for the Christian life, righteousness and freedom...That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, in our gospel lesson today,

and in John 11:25,

where Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”

Luther came to know God in a very different way from the way he was raised to understand God;

transformed from an understanding of God as a one whose measuring stick is a person’s purity or righteousness,

to an understanding and belief in God who gives to his children his righteousness as a gift,

which he can do because of the sacrifice he made in the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus,

who took our sin to the grave with him and in his resurrection gives us life.

Luther learned that Jesus didn’t die to make God a forgiving God but to show how forgiving God is.

When Luther came to this realization he said it was like having the gates of heaven opened to him.

Reading that caused me to recall how, after I serve and receive Holy Communion, God will sometimes, as I look to my soul, grant me a picture of heaven as I pray.

There, after you have received the Word in bread and wine, you find freedom,

freedom from the anxiety and fear of this world for there is no other redeemer but Jesus,

freedom to live another day without carrying the wrongs of the day before around with you,

freedom to live without torturing yourself about your impurity,

freedom to reconcile your relationships,

freedom to love, to serve, to give,

freedom from death through the one who is the light of the world, and who gives you eternal life today and forever.

Amen