

Free at Last
Sunday, Pentecost 22, Year B
Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36
October 31, 2021

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

Luther truly was a reformer. We might argue that he was THE reformer. But, I think that gives him just a bit too much credit. For, there were others. Many others, who had made attempts at reform, called out the corruption, false teachings, and superstitions of the church.

Notice I didn't say the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation wasn't about Catholic versus Protestant. Those categories hadn't been invented yet. Luther, and the other men of reform, were not out to break away from the Roman church, they were looking to remove the things that stood in the way of the Gospel. They weren't interested in the politics that the Pope, cardinals and bishops were interested in. They were interested in the salvation of the people who they served.

It was Christ they served, not the pope. It was the Gospel they proclaimed, not superstitions. It was the Word of God they gave freely to the people, not the selling of indulgences.

Men like John Wycliffe and Jan Hus paved the way for Luther and the reformation of the Church. Through their devotion to the Gospel, these two men made the down payment for the Reformation that Luther would later pay in full and that we continue to enjoy.

In 2017, if you remember, we celebrated the 500 year anniversary of Luther posting the 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany.

This past Spring was the 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms, where Luther made his famous “Here I Stand” proclamation. He then disappeared. For 300 days the world did not know if Luther was alive or dead. He was taken to the Wartburg Castle. There, in order to disguise himself, he grew out his hair and even had a good Lutheran beard! ☺

He even took on an alias, Junker Jorge (which meant “Knight George”.)

But, Luther wasn’t idle while he was there in the Wartburg. Following, again, in the footsteps of the reformers before him, like Wycliffe, he spent his time translating the New Testament into the common language of his people. And, he did so from the Greek (most translations were from the Latin Vulgate, because the Greek was not readily accessible until Luther’s time, thanks to Erasmus of Rotterdam).

In doing this, Luther not only helped the Reformation by giving access to God’s Word to every German, but he also reformed the German language. The Germanic territories each had their own dialect. Which made it difficult for the people from different parts of Germany to converse.

Standing on the backs of the reformers that came before, along with a common language, a common Bible, a common cause.... All of these things, along with some others, made Luther’s reformation successful.

Luther, if he were here today, would not like what I am preaching. For Luther, the Reformation was not about Luther. It was about the Gospel. It was about Christ. It was about the common person, the peasant, the knight, the duke, the prince.... It was about people hearing and being able to hear the truth of our Savior.

He, and we, preach the message of Jesus, "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (Jn 8:31–32).

Free? What does it mean to be free? As Americans, we use that word often. We tout our freedom to the rest of the world. We honor those who have served to keep our freedom secure. And, rightly so. But, this is not the freedom that Jesus speaks about.

The Jews also misunderstood Jesus when he talked about freedom, "*They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"* (Jn 8:33).

"*Never been enslaved to anyone...*" Apparently, they were either being stubborn, or they had truly forgotten one of the foundational events of the Jewish people; the Exodus and their enslavement in Egypt.

They had indeed been enslaved. And, even as they spoke, they were not free. They were under Roman rule. They had an illusion of freedom, but it wasn't real.

Much like we have an illusion of freedom, but it isn't real. Perhaps, to some degree, in the physical sense, it is real. But, we do not have ultimate freedom. It seems we equate freedom with a lack of worry. If anyone attacks the US, I don't need to worry, because we have the greatest military on earth. When it comes to paying the bills, I don't have to worry, because if I have so much in the bank. Or, if I do all the right things, I don't have to worry about God being disappointed in me and the people around me will see me as a good person.

Or, if I don't talk about Jesus at work or school, then I don't have to worry about what people would think or say about me. If I can just get all of these things, along with

the right political party in office, the right hymns in the church, the right stocks in my portfolio, the right amount of money in my bank account, the right mask or vaccine, plus boosters, the right news source, the right bible translation, the right Ahhhh... freedom.... Or, at least, the illusion, thereof.

See how many slave masters we really have. Or, if you want to use the words of Critical Theory, see how many oppressors we all have? If only we can overcome them.

Jesus can only shake His head at us, just as He did with the Jews, this morning, who totally misunderstood Him. We have our hope of 'freedom' in the wrong place. It isn't money, government, military, health or any other idol.

Our freedom, and the only true freedom, comes from Christ. "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed*" (Jn 8:24-36).

After hearing that, let me ask you a question, "Do you practice sin?" Are you a sinner? Do you follow any of those idols. Are you a devotee to CNN or FoxNews? Are you a groupie of a political party? Is money the one thing that will bring you happiness? How about power or prominence? How about just being right and proving others wrong? Are you better at loving your neighbor than those who did or did not get vaccinated or wear a mask? My friend. If any of this is true, you are not free. Do you gossip? Do you wish ill on others? Do you look down on those who do not have what you have? Do you look down on those who have more than you have? Do you look down on anyone? You are not free.

You are a slave to your own passions, lusts, ego, desires.... You are not free.

You have, at least, three masters to whom you are a slave; sin, death, and the devil.

Not to mention the other three who you serve; me, myself, and I.

You call yourself free?

Thank God for the Gospel. Thank God for Jesus. Thank God for the Cross. Thank God for the Reformation. Thank God for men like Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Melanchthon, Chemnitz, Tyndale...

It is not too difficult to see why the reading from Revelation is appointed for this festival, "*Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water*" (Rev. 14:6-7).

Thank God, that through the Reformation, that eternal Gospel was restored to its place of prominence. The idols of indulgences, relics, the pope, and the like were toppled.

While Luther feared for his life as he hid in the Castle of Wartburg, behind its stout walls, he was free. Not free as we see freedom. He could not move about as he wanted. He had to disguise himself to save his life. He was at the mercy of his prince who had set him up in that stronghold.

He had no money. He was a recipient of charity. His health wasn't even that great as his body still was ravaged by his years as a slave to his own guilt and remorse over his sin. But, he was free.

While he was there, the world, the very people he wanted to hear the gospel, were killing each other, attacking churches, attacking soldiers, attacking clergy, attacking each other. Yet, he was free.

The devil continued to assault him, which brings about the legend of him throwing an inkwell at the devil while he remained in isolation. Yet, he was free.

You see, freedom isn't being free of the worries of this world. They will always be present and many. Freedom is knowing that these things are transient. They will not last. They only get to rule for a time. But, there is one who is over all of those things. And, that one has sent His Son to free you from all of the worries of the world. Sin, death and the devil are all conquered by Christ. Do we still face them? Yes. But, we can do so without fear. And, if there is no fear, then they do not control you. If sin comes upon us, whether it is our own or what others do to us, it will pass. If we stare death in the face, we do not need to fear. Our eternity is secure and our Lord is the Lord of death for He has conquered it. St. Paul reminds us, "*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Even the devil, himself, is of no concern to us. He has been defeated as St. John reminds us, "*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil*" (1 Jn 3:8b).

Friends, do not be slaves to this world. Be free by the Gospel.

It was because he discovered the Gospel that Luther had been set free. He then took that Gospel to the people. They shared it, as well. And, that is how the Reformation happened. They, we, just like the Jews this morning, and to all people, are slaves to sin. But, freedom comes from the work of Christ. His death to pay for your sins. He has paid the price to your slave masters. Your debt is paid. Your freedom is purchased. "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (Jn. 8:31-32).

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

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