

Lectionary A October 29, 2017 Reformation Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

Free Indeed

So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

These words—what in the world do they mean?

I've heard about animals that have been caged all their lives, being freed. They don't know what to do with themselves. They stay in one spot. Although the cage doors have been opened and they are technically free, they don't realize their freedom. Being free doesn't mean a thing to them. In fact, it scares them.

My sister adopted a little dog who had been raised in a puppy mill. She was just a little over two years old and had already given birth to two litters of puppies. She had never been out of her cage. When they got her. She shivered with fear. She wouldn't walk around. She wouldn't eat. She wouldn't even bark. You see, she was trained with electric shock that it was painful to bark. For days, my sister had to hand feed her and carry her around. Eventually, with a lot of nurturing, patience, and care, little Roxie finally realizes her freedom. Now, you better not even try to put her in a cage. She will claw her way out. They tried containing her in travel cages on trips and she is quite an escape artist. She now knows what freedom is and is not going to sit around and take being caged any more.

I've talked about my friend who is at the Indiana Women's Prison and has been in prison for almost five years. She anticipates her release in April and writes me that she is scared to death. She is not sure she can handle freedom. Can she handle things on her own? She has nothing. No money, no home, no security outside those walls. What in the world is she going to do? What does freedom mean?

I think, to really understand what we are celebrating, if that is the correct word, this Reformation Sunday, we need to answer that question. That's what the Jews Jesus was talking to was asking?, *"We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free'?"*

You see what happened? Just like little Roxie, these Jewish people had erased from their memories the oppression and slavery in their history, and, why, they were still in an oppressed status, living at that time under the rule of the Roman Empire. They were still in their cage and they didn't realize their captivity was anything but normal. They thought they were free, so what was Jesus talking about? This frightened them. They couldn't get their heads around Jesus' words.

Realizing that freedom is the key to what this reformation thing is all about. Martin Luther discovered these words in scripture. All his life he had tried to be good enough to earn his freedom from his sins. He nearly drove everyone crazy with his obsession with his sins, confessing every little sneeze and hiccup trying to make himself “free”. He was like little Roxie in his cage. Then through the power of the Holy Spirit those words finally sunk in. He was beginning to understand what they meant. Jesus has already opened his cage. He is free to live without fear of condemnation. *So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed!*

What happened when Martin Luther realized he was free? He couldn't keep still. He saw where others were being mistreated and abused. He couldn't stand by and keep his mouth shut. He had to speak up. He had to tell everyone what he discovered in the scriptures, “Freedom!”

This is what we have been talking about the last weeks. We have been focusing on principles that Luther lived by, that drove his life. One was the Theology of the Cross, Luther realized God's presence in suffering, demonstrated to us by Jesus' suffering on the cross. The next week we focused on the principle of Justification by grace through faith. Our freedom is a free gift from God. And last week, our focus was on the Latin words, “SOLI DEO GLORIA” Glory belongs to God alone! God is in everything. God cares for everything. God loves everyone. It is not up to our works or deeds, but on God's Grace that we are free.

And now—what do we do with our freedom? This brings us to our focus on this Reformation Sunday. Vocation. Luther stood on the fact that our vocation as God's children is a calling from God. He believed firmly that as people who benefit from God's generosity, we are called to serve the neighbor and the community. And I take these words from the Reformation 500 source book

Serving is to listen attentively, to care actively about the whole person and about the quality of relationships in the community as a whole. Serving is to exercise the radical freedom that accompanies grace. It is to be informed by the scriptures but not enslaved to any detailed codes of conduct, such as those sometimes drawn up by various Christian leaders.

As we all recognize, as this freedom sinks in and we realize that the scriptures teach that God's goal is shalom (peace/ wholeness/ justice). We who enjoy God's generosity are called to participate in God's project of fostering this shalom. This principle of service to the neighbor is what opens the cage doors of our slavery.

This principle of service to the neighbor leads us to speak out when we see injustice and wear cowboy hats to protest the persecution of immigrants, or kneel at football games to bring attention to the atrocities of racism, or write congressmen, or nail our objections on the Wittenberg door.

We are free and that freedom is the force that leads our vocation, no matter what walk of life we are in. As God's children we are called to proclaim this freedom to everyone, breaking open the cages and spreading God's peace to God's children.

In is scary and hard standing for something that is unpopular. But like little Roxie, once we realize our freedom—well, it can start a Reformation. Amen. .