

Lectionary B October 25, 2015 Reformation Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church
Evansville, Indiana
Roberta Meyer

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

It Takes Guts

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." It takes guts to know the truth. And I am pretty much convinced that we don't have the guts to know the truth. We humans are all about self-preservation. We want to keep ourselves comfortable. That way we feel safe, whether we are or not. Have you ever heard the saying, "My mind's made up, don't confuse me with facts"? Facts are sometimes just too scary for us.

And Jesus was a master at confusing his followers with facts. In our Gospel lesson Jesus was talking to Jews who said they believed in him. They were Jews, brought up with the history in the Torah. They were schooled in their heritage. So where does this statement come from, *"We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone..."* What?

Did they forget about the whole story of Moses and what about the Passover? See, they were comfortable with the way things were. They felt safe and in control. And here Jesus comes and throws their world into a whirl.

That's what truth often does. That is what happened to Martin Luther. He was a devout Catholic monk. So devout in fact that his supervisors said he was excessive. Luther was so wrapped up with trying to be good enough to win salvation that he was very hard on himself. When he went to confession it took so long because he would name every tiny thing that he construed into being a sin. The monk to whom he was confessing had all he could take and told Luther basically to ease up on himself. He refused to sit for hours listening to Luther nitpick about his sins.

You see, Martin Luther was starting to see some of the truth. He was very aware that sin was all over the place—that he couldn't get away from it. This truth was driving him crazy. No matter what he did he could not get away from sin.

But Martin Luther had guts. He didn't deny the truth. He faced it even when it drove him crazy. He kept searching, reading the Bible, praying, studying. And that took guts just to read the scripture. Not everyone had access to the Bible in his time. Only the leaders of the church had the Bible. They told everyone else what it said. (sort of)

It was when Luther read the Bible for himself that he saw the truth that set him free. Part of what Luther saw was the Romans passage. *"...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of*

God; 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Yeah, it was true that Luther could not get away from sin. It was true that nothing he could do would save him from his sin.

But there is more to it. Luther finally got it. God's grace is a free gift. Because Jesus redeemed all of us from our sin, we are free. This is truth we can count on.

But it takes guts to count on it. This truth messes with the Law that keeps us secure. See Law is all about the "ifs" "then". *If you follow all the rules in the Bible God then will love you and you will be happy.* The law always gives us the illusion that we can do something. The law is always conditional. And it is always out of our reach. That is where Luther felt the anguish. No matter what he did, he couldn't do enough to be free from sin.

When Martin Luther discovered the Gospel, the Good News, he saw things in a new light. One commentary says it this way: *The Gospel is not an if-then proposition. The Gospel is a because because because proposition. Because God is our creator and because we rebel against the idea of being created beings and insist on trying to be God for ourselves and because God will not play by our rules and because in the fullness of time when God had had quite enough of all of that God became human in Jesus Christ to show us who God really is and because when God came to God's own and we received him not, and because God would not be deterred God went so far as to hang from the cross we built and did not even lift a finger to condemn but said forgive them they know not what they are doing and because Jesus Christ defeated even death and the grave and rose on the 3rd day and because we all sin and fall short and are forever focused on ourselves and forget that we belong to God ...and because God loves God's creation God refuses for our sin and brokenness and inability to always do the right things to be the last word because God came to save and not to judge and **therefore...therefore...therefore** you are saved by grace as a gift and not by the works of the law and this truth will set you free like no self-help plan or healthy living or social justice work can ever do."*

[\(http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2012/10/sermon-on-why-the-gospel-is-more-wizard-of-oz-y-than-the-law/\)](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2012/10/sermon-on-why-the-gospel-is-more-wizard-of-oz-y-than-the-law/)

And that is when the real gutsy stuff happens. When Martin Luther finally saw the Truth in its real form. When he saw this free gift from God. When he saw Jesus for who he really is, there was no turning back. And the ground he was treading was out of his control. It took guts for Luther to face the truth and proclaim the truth to the church that didn't want to know the truth. He ended up running for his life. He was scary free, but once he saw God's Grace there was no going back to "safe bondage."

I know what it is like to be a slave to lies, to sin. I know what it is like to work myself silly trying to be good enough to make up for what I thought was unforgivable sin. That's what things like abuse does to a child. Then, through God's Grace I saw the truth, that God's Love is bigger than any lie. This truth set me free. But this freedom was and is scary. It takes guts come face to face with ugly facts. It takes guts to face the truth and claim it when others don't want to know the truth.

When new truth, truth that was covered by lies breaks through, we sometimes lose the security of “safe bondage”. But there is no going back.

Let’s look at the John passage again. Jesus said, *“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

What Jesus is saying here? I think we get all wrapped up in the last part about knowing the truth and the truth making us free, that we miss the truth in what Jesus is saying. When we focus on the last part, we are really back in that trap of depending on ourselves. Because one of the first things this does is assume we have the power to identify what is true. And then it says, “if you know the truth, “then” you are going to be free. Sounds like law to me. I can hear the bondage forces yelling, “Ah ha, Gotcha!!!”

It is the first part of what Jesus is saying that saves us. “Continue in my word,” in other words, stay close to me. Jesus is the living breathing truth. Trusting Jesus is the only way we will know the truth. And this takes guts. Because the Truth will always challenge, it will always call us out of safe bondage, it will always take us to uncharted places where we can’t depend on ourselves. And the Truth, Jesus Christ, will never leave us alone.

Yes, Martin Luther knew the scary gutsy feeling of holding onto the Truth. Holding onto Jesus means trusting and depending on Jesus’s love no matter what. There was no going back. Luther’s life was never the same again. In fact, look what he started! The world was never the same again. We are all re-formed by, Jesus, the Truth, with a capital “T”. That is the real meaning of Reformation. It takes guts. That’s the truth.