

Sermon for the Feast of the Reformation

'We are children of Abraham, we have never been enslaved to anyone.'

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This is, of course, an absolute lie.

For the children of Abraham, the Hebrews, were enslaved for four hundred years by the Egyptians. Then they were enslaved by the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Macedonian Greeks, and to be freed from the Greeks they called out for help to the Romans.

The Romans offered them freedom, though freedom under Rome, a half freedom. The very freedom we read about in the Gospel, where there is a Jewish puppet king, Herod, and the true master, Caesar, represented by the miserable Pontius Pilate, under whom our Lord suffered.

In fact, the Jews had been slaves to foreign powers much longer than they had ever been free.

Yet Christ says: *'The truth will set you free.'*

The Jews respond: *'How is it that you say, "we will become free?"'*

Both we and the Jews fail to understand what the Lord is saying when He says that the *the truth will set you free*. He is not referring to any political power. Why would He? Every political power comes and goes, even as a wound is gashed and healed. Every nation falls, whether Babylon or Persia or Napoleon or America. They will all fall. They are creations of men, frail men, who in their sin attempt to make great things; but these great things pass away, even as their founders pass away. This is the tragedy of man.

So from what slavery are Abraham's children to be freed from?

We are given three answers:

First, they are to be freed from the lie, for everyone who believes in the lies of this world is a slave to the father of lies, that is Satan, the accuser, who by his accusation puts all in bondage, puts all under arrest, a practice we should not be startled by, for we practice it to this day.

Second, they are to be freed from sin, for sin itself is slavery. All those who practice sin believe they do so at their own pleasure. They are wrong. They do it because they are in bondage to their own flesh, slaves to their bodies, to their ambition, their greed, their sensuality, their fornication, their envy. They think they do wretched things because they want to. What they do not know is that they only want to do such things because they are in shackles to a wicked thing.

Third, and most strange of all, they are slaves simply because they are *not the Son*. *Only the son remains forever*. Indeed, in the households of old, the servants inherited nothing, even as the hired help of today inherit nothing; but only the legitimate children. So all who are not sharers in the inheritance are, in a sense, slaves. They will receive nothing beyond their wages, and with the death of the son, they will be dismissed.

Yet the Son does not die, not as we think it. As it is written, *the Son remains forever*. For the Son shall die upon a wretched cross, descend to hell, slay the father of lies and the hell of all sins, and rise again, ascending into the heavenly glory, before the face of His Father, to *remain forever*.

All is well and good for the Son, that is, Christ, since He shall remain in the thrones of glory. But what of us, who though we lie and say we have never been slaves, have been slaves to sin, death, and the devil all our lives. What of us?

Jesus gives us a strange, even a ponderous answer: *'If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'*

The reason I say this is strange is because of a simple word: *'if.'*

It is the feast of the Reformation, where we delight in the return of the Gospel, that Christ will, and I say will save us by grace through faith and set us free. And yet this *'if'* seems to cast a bit of doubt on the entire occasion.

Why say *'if'*?

What assurance do we have with an *'if'*? How can we know that we are free? That we are saved? That we will be in heaven with our loved ones and all the company of heaven?

We hear *'if'* and we think of it as a word of anxiety, for sinful men live in a world of anxiety, where 'if' entails 'if not.' We hear *'if'* as a way of saying 'don't get your hopes up.' As in 'sure, we can take a vacation to Hawaii if I win the lottery.' So why would we get our hopes up, knowing that we are enslaved, evil, and sinful. We are not likely to win a lottery when it comes to righteousness before God. In fact, it is not a lottery at all, it is a game of chess, and one we are much losing, and no luck will save us little children. For with God, *'the little ones are dashed upon the rock.'*

Yet *'if'* is not a word of despair, but of hope.

We are told by St. Paul that there are three heavenly virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Love we get well enough, for when you take Christ's body and blood for the salvation of your soul into your corrupted body, you better get it well enough, to know what the Lord of Glory has done for us, who deserve nothing but everlasting death.

But hope we do not understand very well, and that is because it is hard to understand. Why should we, the most miserable of all creatures, have hope in a God that is righteous in His every way? Why should the Righteous One have mercy on the unrighteous, or give them truth, or freedom? Why do we think we deserve any of this at all?

We do not deserve it, we only hope. Hope in the mercy and goodness and forgiveness of the Lord. Did not the widow do the same before the corrupt judge? Hoping for justice before the unjust? Did not the sinful tax collector hope for the same? Hoping for injustice, for mercy where mercy was not merited, before the absolutely just Lord?

Yet Jesus says, *'From these stones, I can raise sons of Abraham.'*

So then, why do we hope? It is because we have faith in one Lord, Jesus Christ, who says simply *'have faith in God.'*

Faith in the God who taught us *'The Lord is my light and my salvation, who then shall I fear?'*

Faith in the God who taught us, *'Every morning brings me word of your unfailing love.'*

Faith in the God who taught us, *'I will break the yoke off you, and I will tear off your shackles.'*

Faith in the God who taught us, *'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'*

In the Church liberated from many superstitions, we are indeed set free. For we are united by water and by the word, by blood and by the bread, to the Son of God Himself, the Second Adam, and the true son of Abraham, the only free man. And this, we have by faith, by trust in the promise. The million promises given by the Lord to His people. And the one promise given to the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that by them, *all nations shall be blessed*. For we are blessed in faith by Christ, again, the only free man, free of sin, overcoming death, and destroying the devil.

We are united to Christ, the true and only Son of God, and being one with Him, when our death comes, and we are presented before the throne of the Almighty, and the Lord of Glory asks us, *who are you?'*

The answer will be simple:

'We are sons of Abraham, we have never been enslaved to anyone.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-20; John 8:31-36.