

Reformation Day (observed), 2008

Gospel: John 8:31-36

First Reading: Revelation 14:6-7

Epistle: Romans 3:19-28

Title: The Truth

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Sometimes the truth hurts.

The truth confronts you and tell you things you don't want to hear. Truth comes in a bank statement that tells you that you're running out of money. Truth comes in medical test results that are positive. Truth comes in a report card that tells you that you should have studied a little harder. Truth comes in an angry conversation, where all the things you've been hiding from each other finally come to the surface. Sometimes the truth hurts.

When you take an honest look at your life, and your family, and the world around you, the truth is not pretty. The truth can be frightening. When we are faced with who we are and what we're really like, when we see ourselves in the mirror of God's law, the truth hurts.

The truth is clearly spelled out in the Epistle reading from Romans 3. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's the truth.

In the church, we speak the truth. Here the Lord speaks directly to you, and His Word is truth. He doesn't sugar coat anything. He doesn't lie to you here just to make you feel better about yourself. Every week we are faced with the truth. We confess that we are poor miserable sinners, that we have offended God, and that we deserve His punishment.

The truth is good, even when it hurts. Lies may make you feel better, but they don't do you any good. What good is a doctor who doesn't tell you the truth? Who tells you that you're fine when you're dying? What good is a teacher who doesn't tell you the truth? Who tells you that your wrong answers are right? What good is a pastor who doesn't tell you the truth? Who tells you that you're really a good person, when you know that you're really not?

Here you are faced with the truth of God's Law. And the truth hurts. In fact, the truth kills. The Law strips you of any reliance on yourself.

Many people ignore the truth and live in denial. They surround themselves with people who will lie to them rather than tell them the truth. Lies are usually more appealing than the truth. This was the case with the Jews in today's gospel. They claimed, "We have never been slaves of anyone." They ignored 400 years of slavery in Egypt. They ignored 70 years of exile in Babylon. They ignored occupation by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. And they ignored their slavery to sin.

So Jesus faces them up to the truth. “Anyone who sins is a slave to sin.” This is the truth and the truth hurts. We also like to take pride in our freedom. We enjoy many freedoms in our country. In just over a week, we will exercise our freedom to vote and choose our leaders and the direction of our country.

Yet despite all of these freedoms, we are still slaves. We still sin daily. And there’s nothing that we can do to stop sinning. We can’t set ourselves free. We are enslaved by our desires and our passions. We can choose to whom to vote for, but we can’t choose not to sin. That’s the truth, and the truth hurts.

This was the case with Martin Luther as well. Martin knew that he was a sinner, that there was nothing good inside of him. Martin was plagued and tortured by the fact that he did not measure up to righteous expectations of the Lord. He lived in constant fear of the Lord and His wrath. The truth drove Martin to the monastery and into the confessional, where he would spend hours confessing all that he had done. Martin felt that bondage to sin. And he tried everything he could think of to work his way free. But the harder he worked, and struggled, the tighter the noose became. The Law is true, and the truth hurts.

But there is another truth, a truth that doesn’t hurt, it heals. A truth that doesn’t kill, it makes alive. A truth that doesn’t bind, it sets you free. Jesus says, “The truth will set you free.” Jesus came proclaiming a new truth. A new kind of truth. A truth that did not hurt, but set you free.

The truth is that you are loved. The truth is that you are forgiven. The truth is that life has triumphed over death, that darkness has not overcome the light. The truth is you have been set free. You are no longer a slave to sin and death. Jesus, the Son, has set you free, He has paid the price of your redemption, and you are free. That is the truth- Jesus said it, Jesus did it. He just set you free once more with the words, “I forgive you all your sins.” Right here, right now, the truth sets you free.

When the Lord speaks to us, we respond with “Amen.” Amen means, “It is true.” It is true that I am a sinner, and it is true that I am forgiven. It is true that the Lord makes me holy, and that I am free. Yes, Amen, it is true, I am free.

You are free from the punishment that your sins deserve. No matter what you’ve done, it is forgiven. There’s no more penalty, there’s no more guilt, you are completely and utterly free. There is no need to fear God’s wrath, because your sins have been taken care of. That’s the truth.

You are free to live your life without worrying about what the future holds for you. Yes, the time will come when your heart stops beating and you fall asleep in the Lord.

But here is the truth- death will not be the end. You will be raised from the dead on the last day and you will have an eternity to enjoy the bliss and splendor of heaven. You will be free from sickness, free from pain, free from all that holds you back and keeps you from enjoying life. No need for medicine or surgery or therapy in heaven- you will be free.

And finally, Satan has no more claim on you. You have been set free from him as well. His power is broken and you have nothing to fear. A champion has come to fight the old satanic foe. You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is he, Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. He holds the field victorious. That is the truth. You are free from sin, free from death, and free from the power of the devil.

Satan will continue to lie to you. He will tell you that you aren't good enough, that God's couldn't possibly love someone like you. But you have been set free from these lies by the truth of God's love.

Martin Luther experienced this freedom when the truth of the Gospel set him free. This is how he describes his life under the truth of the law, the truth that hurts: "But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners." But after the mercy of God was revealed to him, Luther writes, "All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light."

Martin Luther couldn't help but tell other people of the joy he had found in the freedom of the Gospel. He didn't want anyone to remain a slave, living in fear of God's punishment. That freedom caused him to speak out against anything that did not proclaim the truth of the gospel. He could not stand to see others enslaved by their sin.

Brothers and sisters, our neighbors are hurting. They are hurting because of the truth of their sinfulness, and their slavery to sin. The truth hurts. The truth kills. But there is another truth, the gospel-truth. We have been given a truth that heals, a truth that sets free, a truth that brings life and hope and joy and peace. We have been set free to live a life through the righteousness of Christ.

Go, you are free. That's the truth.