

Sermon Reformation 2020

October 25, 2020

John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read. Especially the word, **“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

I don't know if you ever have that where you wake up with a song in your head, but I had that last week. I woke up and I kept hearing a song. The song was called Red Mosquito by the band Pearl Jam. I looked it up and, apparently, it's about a time when the lead singer got a bout of bad food poisoning and he felt really ill. But the words say, “I was bitten, it must have been the devil, just paying me a little visit, reminding me of his presence. Letting me know he's waiting. He's waiting.” Now of course the connection between the food poisoning and the devil is fair. Whether Eddie Vedder believes it or not. As I'm always making the point, something as common and often seemingly minor as food poisoning is a manifestation of the fallenness the devil brought as he tempted and drew our first parents into sin. But isn't this apt for our day?

Look all around us, the devil is paying us visits, isn't he? I know I've mentioned this before, but the word devil comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, to cast or throw through. I think it's hard not to see that and think of how the devil casts through us as people, both internally and how he casts through our relationships with each other and divides us. We're all experiencing that division now. We experience it in the division of views on how to handle something like the coronavirus. We, all the more, I think see it in our nation. Look at how divided our country is politically. Left and right are becoming increasingly separated. Division is having its way. The devil is paying us a visit letting us know that he's waiting. Don't get me wrong, it's not as though he's appearing visibly. One of my favorite quotes is to say that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. If he can convince us that he's not there, then there's no need to battle him. But for those who recognize his division and his works, he's there. He's waiting.

So, what do we do? Well to start, we have to continue according to God's word. I was reading Gene Veith's book “The Spirituality of the Cross” this week for the class I teach at Concordia. I think I've mentioned that before, but that's a great read to understand our lives as Lutherans. The section, in particular, I read centered on what

we call the Two Kingdoms, the understanding that God rules the world altogether in His Kingdom of Power, what we call the Kingdom of the Left. But He rules His Church in His Kingdom of Grace, what we call the Kingdom of the Right. And again to be clear, this is not a reference to political leanings of left and right. The political distinction came about with the left and right sections of the assembly in Paris during the French Revolution. The Two Kingdoms was well before that, discussed by Luther himself.

So, what's the point about these two kingdoms? Veith points out well that as Christians we must ensure that we don't confuse them. The devil wants us to confuse them, but we need to not. We need to make sure that the role of the government is never understood to be that which will bring utopia. You know I think we see that right now. We see people running on platforms that act as though the utopia is within reach. Well, I think we always see that, but with the division that's in place, it's seeming that this perspective is especially prevalent in comparison to years past. There's the expectation that government, the right one, the right candidate, the right president will bring the needed policy to aid us in bringing about the perfect life, or at least life here that's that much more idyllic. This on the one hand can be seen in view of the perspective that if we can maintain the ability to say Merry Christmas, or for our country to keep saying, "In God we trust," this will preserve the ideals we need. On the other it's to say that if we conform to a certain standard we will eradicate injustice. Christians, it's bondage to think that the Government will provide the utopia that only heaven will be. Only in the Kingdom of Christ, His final Kingdom of Glory will there be freedom from injustice, from suffering, perfect freedom to worship Him rightly.

So how do we deal with it? In the knowledge that the government's role should be to serve God's will, God's commands. The government should in that protect the interests of the Church. However, when Paul wrote about the honor due the government in Romans 13, or when Jesus said to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, they were describing the Roman empire, which had not treated Jews as kindly and freely as they ought to have, nor did they treat the Christians well in the early days of the Church. But as we observe our civic duties and rightly so, we ought to remember that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven. The injustices that we as the Church endure, or that we endure as individual Christians have their resolution, they are made right, not by our efforts, but in the suffering of our Lord Jesus on the Cross. In

Him we have the fulness of all that we need. **If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

As I say that, this hope that we have in human government is the hope that we have in the presence of the devil, isn't it? As the devil is around us, as we are "bitten" by him, as he lets us know that he's waiting, there we see the bondage the devil brings to us. There we see the immanence of the devil and his work around us, and how inescapable it is for us of our own efforts. **If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

But as we are in the midst of these constant reminders of the devil and his work around us, we have Jesus reminding us what freedom is and isn't. What do I mean? Well, think about what we think of as freedom. As we are divided in our country, there is an aspect where some of the division comes down to understanding what freedom is. Freedom is viewed in terms of my rights, what's due to me, what I deserve, what I am entitled to. And to what are we entitled? Whatever we want to set our hearts toward. It can be the most depraved of sin, but my freedom ought to allow me the ability to pursue it. I describe it by saying that we have confused liberty and license in our day. We aren't seeking to be free, we are seeking license to do commit any and every act that seems pleasurable to us.

I was listening to some quotes from some public figures, one being a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto named Jordan Peterson. Now, Dr. Peterson, I don't believe is a professing Christian, but there are a lot of things that he says that I think are consistent with what we could call Judeo-Christian ethic. The quote I heard from him was one I really appreciated. He said something to the effect of this: "Over the last 50 years our conversations have focused on rights. Discussion of rights has its place and is good, but we have done this to the detriment of our conversation about responsibility."

Jesus says it this way, "**everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.**" It's not a sin to have or seek rights. It is a sin to seek to have the right to sin. Therein is a part of our problem. As Paul says in Galatians, "it is for freedom that Christ has set you free." **If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** But, Paul says don't use that freedom as an opportunity to serve the flesh. This is our bondage. We are bound to this desire to serve the flesh.

I was reading a book this week that described a family in Germany during the days of Hitler this week. The author talked about how one of the members of the

family had decided that he should move to Israel in the early thirties—if I recall correctly. Just after the time of Kristallnacht, however, he had some connection in Hitler's government who notified this man that his family was on the list to be arrested for their Judaism. If he would return and take them with him to Israel, this connection would ensure the entire family had safe passage. When the man went to get the family, however, they wouldn't go. They denied that things would be that bad for them. They saw Israel as grimy and dirty, and below them. They didn't want to leave behind the wonderful life that they had in Berlin, with all of its comforts and seeming security. Sadly, the man had to leave without any of his family. They were blind, they were enslaved to their position.

This is us in sin. This is us as the devil divides us. This is us as we seek rights to sin rather than responsibility in serving our neighbor. And this all points to the enslavement that we have under sin, under death, under the devil.

But Christians, **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** And He has. We have all of the ways we see the bondage around us, but the resounding message of Jesus is that you have been set free. Your eyes may not tell you that. But the strong word of Jesus promises it to you. It promises you that as Jesus has died for your sin, you have been forgiven, freed from its debt. It promises that very body and blood given and shed for you on the cross comes and touches your lips that you may taste and see the freedom. It promises you that as Christ has been raised your bondage to death has been overcome because He will raise even your body from the grave. It promises you this as you were joined to His resurrection in baptism. That strong word promises that as Christ has done all of this, and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus now reigns with all authority in heaven and earth. That means that this devil who is waiting will wait in vain for you. He will wait in vain for you because you have been freed. You have been purchased, your life is now found in Christ.

As we celebrate the Reformation today, Christians—Lutherans!—that is what we're celebrating: freedom. We aren't celebrating Luther in and of himself this day. No. We are celebrating that freedom of the Gospel. We are celebrating that this devil who would try to impede that word, would attack it, bind us, and divide us, this old evil foe, now not only means deadly woe but knows deadly woe himself from that Christ who holds the field forever; the Christ who saves us by His grace alone, through faith in Him alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

