

“The Lord of hosts is with us,
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.” AMEN!

If you have been a Lutheran you likely are
very familiar with this quote:

“You will know the truth and
the truth will make you free.”

It comes from the Gospel of John.

For many of us that statement is confirmation
that Jesus’ message, his embodiment of God,
is both truth-filled and freeing.

It’s the good news that Martin Luther took and
nailed to the door at the
Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

That action, and his ability and willingness,
to not back down was one of the catalysts
for the Protestant Reformation.

We put on red, and change the altar cloths to red
to signify the Holy Spirit’s activity both
then and now.

For the reformation continues in, above,

under, and through us. (Pause)

Reformation is like confirmation.

We might have gone through confirmation, or not,
but it's not to be viewed as once and done.

Neither is reformation.

Let me tell you the story of Amy's confirmation.

The day finally came and Amy was being confirmed,
she saw that day as the day of freedom!

See, the deal with her parents was
that after confirmation, she could decide.

After confirmation, she could decide if
she wanted to attend Sunday church or not.

Amy was looking forward to that freedom of more time.

She could play sports on Sunday or watch TV.

She could be free to be a kid.

So as she got ready for church on the day
she would be confirmed.

On that Reformation Sunday, she got dressed
and recalled the fourth commandment:

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

And she recalled Martin Luther's dialogue of teaching:
What does this mean for us?

"We are to fear and love God so that we do
not neglect his Word and the preaching of it,
but regard it as holy and
gladly hear and
learn it."

Amy thought of all this as she got dressed
with butterflies in his stomach.

She was thankful to see her peers and hear
that they were a little nervous, too.

Before long she and her fellow confirmands
found their seats and the prelude began.

Her mind wandered to freedom.

"If you continue in my word,
you are truly my disciples.

You will know the truth and the truth

will make you free.”

Before she knew it, the pastor’s sermon
was complete and the congregation was
standing to sing the Hymn of the Day.

Amy’s butterflies came back.

It was almost time to make the promise
in front of the whole congregation and God.

Everyone smiled and beamed with pride.

Then in serious tone of voice the Pastor asked
the students if they promised
to continue in Jesus’ word.

They were familiar words she
had heard during baptism.

Do you promise to come to worship and
receive communion?

Do you promise to read the Bible and
serve God through word and deed from
this point on and for the rest of your life?

Amy found herself saying the words,
“I do and I ask God to help and guide me.”

She wasn't sure what made her say the words
but at that moment she understood how
they had been written in her heart all along,
just like it says in Jeremiah.

Amy was in the midst of freedom and
it washed through her body and
tingled her senses.

No longer was she encountering a nervous stomach.

She was, in fact, free.

In the coming days, Amy experienced the freedom
she was promised and she experienced
freedom more and more in the years
that followed.

God had heard her prayer that she asked
when she said, "I do, and I ask God to help
and guide me."

God heard the prayer and helped and guided
Amy and she'd found the joy of living in
total freedom of Jesus' love.

The week after confirmation Amy woke up and
took a shower and got dressed for church.

She would attend worship now
not because people were checking to be sure
she was present or to take sermon notes
for extra Confirmation class credit.

Amy would be there because she wanted to be there.

And each time she would confess at the
beginning of worship, she would be made free.

Each time she listened to the Gospel proclaimed,
she would experience a lifting of her spirit.

Amy was free to love and serve the Lord in word
and deed and open her arms to people
who were different from her.

Amy looked around at his worship community
and found people to guide her and
she found people she could guide.

She saw that the Christian community was
not perfect but that Jesus resided there
because they admitted to being broken.

Suddenly, freedom meant more than time
to watch tv or play sports.

Freedom meant more than having endless options.

Freedom now meant abiding with Jesus
to love the unlovable and
embrace the marginalized.

A new promise, a new covenant was revealed and
that creation of being made
new continues to grow.

No longer should we fear death.

No longer should we fear
God's punishment or exclusion.

No longer do we need to fear God running over us.
(Pause)

St. Stephen, I am here to tell you that
God is God and we are God's people.

When Jesus spoke his words to his disciples,
He knew they had trying times ahead.

He knew the freedom written upon their hearts
would be threatened and tested.

I believe we are undergoing this same threat
to the freedom written upon our hearts.

So, what can we do?

Listen again to the words of Jesus,
“If you continue in my word,
you are truly my disciples.

You will know the truth and the truth
will make you free.”

He is calling to us all.

Today, we commemorate Martin Luther and
the launch of the Reformation,

but it will be for naught if we do not
continue in Jesus’ word.

“Continue in my word,” Jesus said.

At Bible study, in small group fellowship,
at lunch with a friend,
on walks through nature,
at worship - continue in Jesus’ word.

Then you will truly be His disciples and
you will know the truth and the truth
will make you free.

You see, freedom comes after discipleship,
and after knowing truth.

So where are you?

Are you stuck at continuing in Jesus' word?

Or have you gotten there and balk at
the discipleship part that brings us to
the knowing of the truth.

It is even possible to be past these two points
but still unwilling to be made free.

Can you imagine that?

We could actually be ready for Christ's freedom,
but unaware of being in slavery.

Today, may be the day for you to have
the freedom promised by Jesus.

That Truth is pursuing you and me.

Jesus is coming to us.

May the words of my mouth and
the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable and pleasing to you,

O God.

AMEN!