Michael J. Mathey
Reformation Sunday
October 25, 2026
Text: John 8:31 – 36
Title: Truth and Freedom (adapted from CPR)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Truth and freedom, both of these ideas are precious to each one of us. We want others to tell us true statements, not lies. We want what we hear on the radio, see on TV, or read in newspapers to be true. We talk about truth in advertising. With the coming election, we try to decide which politicians and officials can be trusted, and their statements are often carefully analyzed by commentators and reporters to see if they telling the truth. We want to learn the truth about certain historical events – what really happened.

We know about freedom here in America, and we treasure our liberties – the freedom to worship without persecution from the government, the freedom to vote for the candidate of our choice, the freedom to travel when we want and where we want. We are blessed with freedom to a degree that many people could only begin to imagine. Truth and freedom are both precious things that we should be abundantly grateful to have. People have fought and died for the sake of one or the other, and sometimes they have fought and died for both of these ideas together.

In the Gospel reading for today's Reformation celebration, we hear Jesus Himself speaking of these precious things, truth and freedom. The word "truth" in the text from John 8 does not signify simply the ordinary meaning of the word or a philosophical concept like Pontius Pilate thought it did while he had Jesus on trial. No, if you look closely at the text you will see that Jesus talks about *the* truth. He is referring to the ultimate truth that is of the greatest importance for every human being. The Reformation, which began over 500 years ago on October 31st and was started by Martin Luther, was concerned with this particular truth.

that they were heirs of salvation, because they were physical descendants of Abraham and God's chosen people. God had made His covenant with their ancestors, and as God's chosen people, they felt they had never been in spiritual bondage to anyone or anything. They were not slaves of idols like the Gentiles were; they lived outwardly good lives and were free from the corruption that marked the public lives of the Gentiles.

But they were fooling themselves. Being descendants of Abraham would not be enough to save them. John the Baptist once warned the Pharisees and Sadducees, who prided themselves in being Abraham's descendants, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." These unbelieving Jews were not as good as they thought they were.

Martin Luther, in the early part of his life, was living under a false concept of reality also; he didn't have the truth that sets free. As a monk in the Roman Catholic Church, he was taught, and he believed, that a person could earn God's favor and salvation by performing good works. So Luther felt that his salvation depended on what he did, that he had to win his salvation, that everything depended on his efforts and his sincerity. But this is not the way a person is saved. Luther was operating under a false concept of God and salvation.

Both Luther and those who opposed Jesus were controlled by an unreality, they were slaves of falsehood. At the bottom of this belief in falsehood is the fact that all people are sinful. Falsehood and belief in falsehood are simply manifestations of people's sinful nature. The Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes 7:20 that, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." No one is without sin. This included the unbelieving Jews in Jesus' day; it included Martin Luther and those like him in his day; and it includes you and me today.

As if this wasn't enough, Jesus tells us that everyone who does sin is the slave of sin. Not only are people sinful, but left to themselves they are *ruled* by sin. They are helpless before

Through faith in Jesus which God works and preserves in you *through the Gospel*, you have forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. You do absolutely nothing for your salvation; it is a totally free gift from God. Through faith in Christ, you are freed from being a slave to sin. You are freed from the *guilt* of sin. Through faith in Christ you have forgiveness for all of your sins. Through faith in Christ, you have received the righteousness that Christ has won for everyone with His perfect life and innocent suffering and death, and so you are declared righteous, you are justified by God. We heard it from Paul at the end of the epistle reading, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

Jesus told those Jews who believed in Him, and He is telling you and me today, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." We are called to abide in Christ's Word, *the* truth; we are to keep on reading the Word, hearing it, studying it, and partaking of the Word that we can see and taste in the Lord's Supper. This is a mark of truly being a disciple of Jesus. Some believe in Jesus for a while, but then they lose contact with His Word, and fall from faith and end up back in slavery. Jesus wants us who are free to remain in His Word, in *the* truth, so that *the* truth will continue to keep us free.

Today, in this Reformation celebration, we can rejoice that through God's grace Martin Luther was able to recover *the* truth of Christ's Word, the Gospel. All who do not believe the truth are slaves – of falsehood and of their own sin. Tragically, they are headed for everlasting damnation. But we and all others who have faith in Christ are free! We are free indeed, and for this we give thanks to our gracious and loving God! May we continue to abide in *the* truth of Christ's Word, may we share His Word, *the truth* with as many other people as we can – because *the truth* sets all people truly free! Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.