

“Undeserved Freedom”

John 8:31-36

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Freedom is a principle with which we are all very familiar. We celebrate our nation's Independence Day on the 4th of July. Now, being an official Texan, I even get to celebrate Texas Independence Day on March 2nd (and we all know that one is better anyway). Freedom, though, we also know comes at a cost—that old adage (and I think a song lyric) that “freedom isn’t free.” There’s a cost to it. It’s something that must be fought for and earned. In our Gospel lesson, though, Jesus turns that idea completely on its head. He doesn’t command those who are listening to fight for their right to be free from sin, but simply declares that they are set free by His grace. In fact, they are slaves to sin, and slaves cannot set themselves free. They can only be freed if their master releases them and no longer claims ownership of them. As we observe the celebration of the Reformation today, we are reminded by Christ in our text that it is only by His grace that we receive our undeserved freedom.

The Reformation “Solas” have been a guiding principle for the Lutheran church for over a millennium. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), and *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) continue to be our rallying cry as we face the ongoing challenges of a sin-darkened world. Why were they necessary mottos to put forth when they seemingly are implied as being true? Well, at the risk of going into a history lesson, which you all know I don’t particularly care for, let’s talk briefly about why, since I can relatively boil it down into a single argument. These “Solas” arose because of the call to repentance that was issued to the church by the Reformers that they abandon their doctrine of self-righteous works. Everything in the church at the time of the Reformation was centered around how good you could be in order to merit God’s grace, including buying yourself out of the bondage of sin.

And not much has changed in the church at large. So many continue to teach a doctrine of “Me” instead of the doctrine of Christ and His vicarious atonement. It’s all about what can I do for myself and what can I do for God and not what God has done for us. There’s a reason we stand firm upon the doctrines of our church, and it’s not because they fit into the society. We stand upon *Sola Scriptura*, not “Scripture alone as long as it doesn’t make me feel bad or tell me I’m wrong.” We stand upon *Sola Gratia*, not “Grace alone as long as I get to participate in it and show how good I am.” We stand upon *Sola Fide*, not “Faith alone as long as I get to decide when and where I let Jesus in.” It’s the same principle with this teaching about freedom in our text. Nowhere here does Jesus

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say, “Fight the good fight and you’ll earn the right to be released from your sin.” He simply says, “If you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (Jn. 8:31-32).”

As we end up with all of these conversations, this winds up being a discussion about the proper understanding of justification and sanctification. You cannot be sanctified without first being justified, and yet, they cannot be separated from one another. One who is justified is at that moment sanctified, but it never works the other way. Sanctification flows from justification. It is a response of faith that shows who we are in Christ. There is indeed a fight to be fought, but it only comes after freedom has been granted to us on account of Christ. For those who are not in the faith, the only fight they want to fight is for their right to party (I know that one’s a song lyric). As those who are in the faith, we fight the way Paul describes in 1 Timothy 6:12. We “fight the good fight of faith,” taking hold of the eternal life to which we were called. And that fight can only begin after we have been set free from the bondage of sin, not before. That freedom which is ours is only so because of Christ’s gracious gift. Full stop. Nothing we do contributes, and the things that follow are fruits of that freedom, not necessary actions to complement what’s been given.

If we take it upon ourselves to break the shackles of sin, then we will only find ourselves descending deeper into its lordship over us. The devil laughs in our face as we have the audacity to believe we can overcome him on our own. He fills the world, eager to devour us, and he does that by holding the Law before us and showing us how utterly incapable we are to keep it. Because the Law does just that, “For by works of the Law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin.” Our Epistle lesson from Romans can’t be any clearer. Our works serve only to condemn us if not done in faith through Christ. All people will be held accountable to God according to His Law, and Satan loves to put that in your face.

Satan seeks to keep you in the bondage of sin, though he works through many means to make you believe the opposite. He wants you to believe that by “enlightening yourself” you can achieve a knowledge beyond that of even God’s and see past the sins in which you are lost. They aren’t really sin; they are just unnecessary regulations that keep you from enjoying yourself in this life. But there is where he loses his edge against God’s people. We have the one little word that can fell him, and that word is LIAR. Satan is a liar. He is the great deceiver and he has led many a people astray from the truth of the Gospel. That is why the steadfastness of our confession is so important. Our confession that Jesus Christ alone (*Solus Christus*) is the “founder and perfecter of our

faith (Heb. 12:2),” makes the devil squirm. He has no weapon against the Son of God, and his attempts to make you believe he has power over the one true God are futile.

The truth of the Gospel sets you free from bondage to those sins the adversary seeks to keep you in. He knows that if you believe in salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone that he no longer has any claim upon you. And that is why we call him out for his deception with that one little word. Through faith in Christ who has set us free, we have the strength and power to defeat the devil and all his minions, because Jesus has defeated them already. In giving us freedom, He has opened our eyes to the truth, and the truth is Him, the very Son of God. You don’t have to set yourself free, because He has already done it by His blood. We now know the truth, and the truth has set us free. Jesus reveals to us in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Only by His grace are we freed from the bondage of sin and able to stand before our Father in heaven as adopted sons.

Slaves do not remain forever, but sons remain forever. That is the gift of freedom we have been given. Not just simply a breaking of shackles and slavery being cast off, but we have been adopted into sonship, forever changed from slaves to heirs of the kingdom. Because we are justified by grace through faith in Him alone, Jesus presents us as brothers to His Father in heaven, and He welcomes us with open arms as those whom He loves for the sake of His Son. And one day we will stand in His glory, together with all the saints and angels, to partake in the Lamb’s High Feast, the marriage feast in the kingdom which shall have no end. Here on this side of heaven, we rejoice in the presence of those same saints and angels as we gather at His table to receive His very body and blood as an absolute certainty that sin is no longer our master. We eat of the body of Christ which redeemed us on the cross, and we drink of the blood which was shed for our salvation. By the freedom of His death, we stand here together as “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6).”

Freedom from sin is not something we must work toward or earn for ourselves. There is no revolutionary war that must be fought and won—no declaration of independence that needs to be drafted and signed. Freedom is ours because Jesus Christ bled and died to redeem the world, and by faith in Him and that atoning sacrifice, we have forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have freedom in Jesus. That is what He says to the Jews and to us in our Gospel lesson this morning. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (Jn. 8:36).” You don’t have to question it, because it is already done. Jesus has broken the shackles of sin that bind you, and it is no longer your master.

Slavery to sin is not your reality anymore. And every bit of that truth is wrapped up in what Christ has done for you. It is indeed undeserved freedom.

You have done nothing to deserve it, and yet He freely gives it. You have deserved only condemnation, and instead God has given you salvation. There is no mystery hidden in Jesus' statement. There is no hidden meaning that you have to unlock through your works. It has been given to you on account of the Son, who died on the cross, shedding His precious blood that your sins would be atoned for, and you would have eternal life with Him. Each and everyone of the Reformation "Solas" emphasizes that truth. We know that to be true because Scripture alone has revealed it to us, God's grace alone has given it to us, and by faith alone we have received it. And what we have received points us to the blessing of salvation which is ours in *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), and because of His gift of undeserved freedom, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, eternally in the light of His glory by His grace alone. To God alone be the glory, forever and ever, *Soli Gloria Deo*. Amen.