



Reformation Sunday, Year A

Missy Schroeder, Indiana-Kentucky Synod

Director for Evangelical Mission

Gospel Text – John 8:31-36

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Jesus speaks of truth and freedom as spiritual realities known through his word. He reveals the truth that sets people free from sin.

³¹ Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

SERMON TEXT:

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

Good morning. My name is Missy Schroeder, and I serve as the Director for Evangelical Mission in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod.

I bring you greetings from our wider church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and from our Bishop Tim Graham and the staff at the Office of the Bishop.

Today is Reformation Sunday. It is a day when we remember Martin Luther, the 95 Theses, and a movement that began more than 500 years ago. But Reformation Sunday is not simply a day to remember something that happened in the past. Reformation is not a museum piece. It is not a story we take out once a year, dust off, admire, and then put away again.

To reform means to make changes in order to improve something. It means that something is being reshaped, renewed, or made new. And our scripture readings today remind us that reformation is not only something that happened to the church 500 years ago. Reformation is something God is continually doing—in the church, in our communities, in our relationships, and within each one of us.

We hear this promise in Jeremiah: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." God does not say, "Try harder, prove yourselves, and then perhaps I will claim you." God says, "I will." I will put my law within them. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. I will forgive their iniquity. I will remember their sin no more.

God begins the relationship. God always moves toward us first.

Jeremiah is describing more than a set of rules written down for people to obey. God's promise is to come near enough to write love, mercy, forgiveness, and belonging upon our very hearts. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." From the least to the greatest, all will know God. Not just the powerful. Not just the people who seem to have it all together. Not just those who believe all the right things, say all the right words, or never make a mistake. All will know God.

And God says, "I will forgive them, and I will remember their sin no more." What an extraordinary promise. God knows us completely—the beautiful parts of us and the parts we would rather hide—and still chooses relationship. Still calls us beloved. Still says, "You are my people."

Paul says the same thing in a different way in his letter to the Romans. All of us have sinned. All of us have missed the mark. None of us can earn our way into God's love. None of us can prove that we are worthy enough, faithful enough, productive enough, or good enough to deserve grace.

And that is good news, because God's grace was never something we could earn in the first place. It is pure gift.

God comes to us in Jesus longing for relationship—not because we deserve it, not because we have worked hard enough, and not because we have finally gotten everything right, but because

God loves us. Faith itself is a gift. Reconciliation is a gift. Grace is a gift. God begins the relationship, and God continues to break forth again and again to draw us into life.

That gift of faith sparks a relationship we are invited to nurture and tend. We tend it through worship and prayer. We tend it at this table, through bread and wine, as we receive again the promise that Christ is given for us. We tend it through forgiveness, through loving our neighbors, through caring for one another, and through noticing the places where God is already at work in the world.

And as we tend that relationship, it reforms us. It changes our frame of reference. It turns us away from obligation and toward response. It frees us from constantly trying to prove our worthiness. It challenges the messages of our culture that tell us we are only worth what we can produce, how successful we can be, how useful we are to others, or how well we can hold everything together.

God speaks a different truth: You are loved. You are seen. You are valued. You belong to God before you accomplish one single thing.

I wonder what would happen if we could feel that truth deeply within us—not only understand it as a theological idea, not only agree that it sounds nice, but know it in our hearts. What would it

reform within us? What would it loosen? What would it heal?
What would it free us from?

Jesus says in John's Gospel, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

What is this truth that sets us free? John has been telling us from the very beginning of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." All things came into being through this Word. In the Word was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The truth is that we were made by God, loved by God, and given life and light before we could ever do one single thing to earn it. The truth is God's grace. The truth is God's love. The truth is God's presence with us. And the truth is revealed to us in Jesus, the Word made flesh, who comes to show us what God's love looks like in a human life.

This freedom Jesus gives is not freedom to do whatever we want without concern for anyone else. It is freedom from the things that bind our hearts and souls. It is freedom from guilt and shame. Freedom from the fear that we are not enough. Freedom from needing to be right at the expense of relationship. Freedom from defining ourselves or others by the worst thing we have ever

done. Freedom from all that limits us from becoming the people God created us to be.

And it is freedom for something. We are freed to love boldly. We are freed to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. We are freed to serve our neighbors, to stand beside those who are hurting, and to work for change in our communities. We are freed to take faithful risks, knowing that we will make mistakes along the way and trusting that everything begins and ends with God's love and grace.

We hear something of this freedom in Psalm 46. The mountains shake. The waters rage and foam. The nations rage and kingdoms shake. It sounds a little like the world we know, doesn't it? So much feels uncertain. So much noise competes for our attention. We see conflict, division, fear, and suffering. Sometimes the shaking is happening not only around us, but within us—in our families, our relationships, our churches, our bodies, or our own hearts.

And right there, in the midst of the shaking mountains and raging waters, God says, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Be still.

Not because the trouble is imaginary. Not because the pain does not matter. Not because we are supposed to ignore what is happening around us. The psalm tells us that God is present in

the midst of it all. God breaks the bow, shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire. God interrupts the cycles of violence and invites us to stop—to release our fear, our frantic striving, and our illusion that everything depends upon us—and to remember who God is.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Maybe reformation begins there. Before we rush to fix everything around us, perhaps God invites us to become still enough to receive the truth again: You are mine. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are free.

Then, rooted in that truth, we can begin to ask what needs to change.

How are we being invited to reform—to make changes within ourselves, our communities, our churches, and our relationships? What is binding us and keeping us from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and from loving our neighbors as ourselves? Where have guilt, shame, fear, resentment, or the need to prove ourselves taken up too much room in our hearts? Where might God be inviting us to let go, to forgive, to listen, to repair, or to begin again?

And how is God already showing up in your life with love, grace, and mercy? Where do you notice even a small glimmer of light shining in the darkness? Who has reminded you that you are seen and valued? Where have you experienced a grace you did not earn and could never repay?

This is not a reformation of ideas alone. It is a reformation of our hearts. It begins with our experience of living in this truth: We are loved, seen, and valued by God—and so is everyone else. Every single person. Even the person we struggle to understand. Even the person with whom we disagree. Even the person the world overlooks. From the least to the greatest, God says, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

If that truth is written on our hearts, it changes the way we see ourselves and the way we see one another. We no longer have to live from scarcity, competition, guilt, or shame. We can live from love and freedom. We can share the grace we have received. We can participate in God’s ongoing work of reforming the church and the world—not because it all depends upon us, but because God is already at work and invites us to join in.

So today, more than 500 years after Martin Luther and the 95 Theses, the Reformation continues. God continues to write on human hearts. God continues to forgive. God continues to set people free. God continues to shine light into the darkness. God continues to call us back to the truth of who we are and whose we are.

Jesus says, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

Free to be still and know that God is God. Free to release the exhausting work of proving our worth. Free to receive grace as

gift. Free to let that grace reform our hearts. Free to love God and our neighbors. Free to live boldly, serve boldly, forgive boldly, and love boldly.

You are loved. You are seen. You are valued. You belong to God. Let that truth be written upon your heart. Let that truth reform you. And then go out and share that freedom, grace, mercy, and love with all the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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