

Reformation Day – 2023
Revelation 14:6-7
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

Patrick Henry is famously quoted as having said: “Give me liberty or give me death.” It was a rallying cry for the American Revolution. Liberty is a synonym for freedom. Give me freedom or give me death. What is freedom? The movie *Braveheart* is a work of historical fiction about Sir William Wallace, a 13th century Scottish warrior who strove for independence from English oppression. In the movie, and this part is close to the historical truth, Wallace is caught by the British and is facing an intensely painful execution. The movie alludes to him being disemboweled, and his executioner pleads with Wallace to cry “mercy” to trigger a swift death. Instead, and this is fiction, Wallace cries out “freedom.” Is freedom one of the highest gifts of God? Where does freedom come from? Is freedom an essential part of your faith? Would you die for it?

In the book of 2 Corinthians, St. Paul catalogues what he had suffered to that point as an apostle. Here are just a few: “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned” (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). I find that to be astounding. Why would he endure all of that abuse? Jan Hus was the theological forerunner of Martin Luther. Hus was burned at the stake for heresy in the year 1415. He too called out the Roman Catholic Church for her theological abuses. Hus means “goose” in Czech. Hus said this at his execution: “You may kill a weak goose, but more powerful birds, eagles and falcons, will come after me.” One hundred years later, Martin Luther was universally understood to be that more powerful bird. Here I stand. Luther knew well the mortal threat that he was under. Yet he would not recant his teachings on the Gospel, on grace, on Christ’s sufficiency, on the biblical truth that the just live by faith. It was freedom. Luther was free and was not going to submit to the shackles of a self-righteous religion. Freedom is an empty tomb. Freedom is a gracious God. Freedom is deliverance from sin and death, from guilt and shame, from Satan and hell and vanity. Freedom tastes heaven and will never sell its birthright. Are you free?

Jesus was having a contentious and hostile argument with some folks who are difficult to describe. Were they believers? St. John says that they were. Were they antagonistic toward the Lord Christ? That much is plain by the context. What is obvious is that their minds are darkened and Jesus can’t break through. The Lord said to them: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31). That remark sets them off. “We don’t need you to be free. We’ve never been enslaved to anyone.” Ha! The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians – they all had held Israel captive. But some *national power* can never be man’s real captor. Those folks thought that they were free but they weren’t. Here’s a paraphrase of Jesus’ response to them: “Whatever you think makes you free is irrelevant. This is the truth: sin enslaves, and My presence among you confirms the fact that you are sinners.” “Your slavery to sin required my coming and I’m the only one who can deliver you.”

That spiritual dilemma, that a person who “does sin” is a slave to sin, that dilemma is a universal dilemma. No one is exempt. Everyone is bound to Satan, bound to his infernal kingdom, bound

to death and separation from God. Everyone... unless set free. Christ took up our flesh to set us free. That man's flesh, Jesus of Nazareth's flesh, is freedom. Embracing Him is embracing freedom. Rejecting Him is rejecting freedom and choosing to remain a slave to sin. We spend so much time in America talking about freedom, about the Constitution, about our system of government and all that is good. But all that is a secondary product of Christ's death and resurrection. All that is the civic echo of what God has done in delivering us by Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice. He is freedom – now and always for people everywhere and beyond everywhere. Freedom is the immunity of the sons and daughters of God from every contrary power. No one takes freedom away. No one has the *ability* to take it away. St. Paul died knowing that. Jan Hus tasted that freedom and would not give it up. Those two men died free. You know this freedom.

You taste this freedom on your knees and your heart knows how blessed you are. Forgiven; is there anything more assuring of life than that Christ died for you, rose again, and feeds you His body and blood? You are strong in His grace. You forgive others because you know how free you are. But you've been on the other side, haven't you? Sadly, you've held your forgiveness hostage till that other person, that "sinner" deserved it (whatever that means). At times, you've felt unforgivable for the way you have behaved. You've felt lost, small, alone; and God came for you. With His Word, with His grace, with His blood, God came for you.

Freedom; sometimes we don't treat the gift as we should. Sometimes we remain juvenile in our faith. We emphasize what we believe to be our inherent rights in this world, we fuss over our possessions, our precious peace of mind, our personal comfort and then when those things are threatened we act as though our whole world is being taken away. Isn't it time to advance beyond being greenhorns on this journey, advance beyond being novices and do more than just think about freedom, do more than just contemplate the Truth but live it.

"God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). Live that. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). Live that. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Live that. The beautiful reality is this: Free people *do* live this way. Christ was and is the free man. He lived that way and His life is in you. His freedom is in you. That is God's intent. Each of us having all that Christ has done and all that Christ is is God's intent. You are free. You are free *now*. Ah, but there is a steadfast aspect to this. We don't believe "once free, always free." Each of you could go off the rails from freedom back to slavery. I certainly could. Listen to His words. His words are super direct. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31). Abide, remain, stay – that's what He wants, for you to remain in His Word. You get that, right? It's a pretty straightforward proposition, right? Disciple, Word, Truth, Abide, Freedom – you get that, right?

The trouble is is that some Christians think that the Word is an academic thing, a theological bookish thing and not a living, dynamic interaction with Him who is the Word made flesh. So they don't interact with it, they leave it unexamined, unexplored. Oh, man, that Bible class... I don't know the Bible, I'll be a dummy. Oh, man, that Bible class... I just can't relate. Oh, man, that Bible class... I just can't focus that long. Whatever. "Abide in me and I in you" (John

15:4). That's what Jesus said because He knows that your freedom is there, in that Word; glorious, unfettered, empowering freedom. The free Man remains among us. Christ abides with us. How? Where? In His Word. His disciples follow Him. His disciples know the Truth. He is the Truth. He is the crucified and risen Savior of the world. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through that crucified Savior (John 14:6). He said: "Where I am, there my servant will be also" (John 12:26).

Do you know who's free? Besides Jan Hus and St. Paul and Martin Luther, do you know who's free? John Hinkleman is free. Christ set our brother free. In this place, John was set free over and over and over. The Gospel set John free. The Truth set John free. Christ's resurrection set John free. Death set John free. God pulled John through Jesus' cross and grave and brought John to heaven. John was and is Christ's servant. Where I am there my servant also will be. From here to heaven; Christ has been with John throughout; and now, forever. John is free. Thanks be to God, the saints of Christ the King are free.