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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
November 3, 2013  
Reformation Sunday

Scripture Lessons:; Psalm 119:97-105 Jude 3-4, 16-21  
Hymns: 294; 261; 774; 283 (798:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 31 John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in  
My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the  
truth, and the truth shall make you free."

33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have  
never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be  
made free'?"

34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever  
commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the  
house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son  
makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: "Sola Scriptura!"

This is one of the three "Solas" or "onlys" that was put forth and  
defended as a part of the confession of the Lutheran Reformation.  
It tells us just how important it is to have the Scriptures as our  
foundation for faith and life. The alternative is to have no sure

foundation at all. The ideas and values that man puts forth are in constant flux. They are as sure as shifting sands. And yet that is what so many chose as they disregard the Word of God as being a source of real, factual truth. Many in the world would prefer to make reference to the truth of the Bible as being abstract, or philosophical, or ethical truth. What it all comes down to is **respect**.

When we have respect other people we also trust them. We will trust their word. We will accept that when they tell us things that are essential to life they will not be making these things up as they go along. They will be telling the truth we need to hear, the truth that will give us the information we need for our lives.

So then what about God and God's Word? So then what is our attitude toward God? Do we trust Him? Do we trust God enough that we are confident that He would only tell us the truth? Do we **respect** the Lord enough to take Him at His Word? What should be our attitude toward this book? Is it really God's Word? There is much evidence internally within the Bible that it is indeed the Word of God, but the conviction that it is in fact God's Word comes to us only by the working of the Holy Spirit. So then, do we **respect** the Bible as being truth?

As we observe this Reformation Sunday we are reminded of how it was Luther's access to the Bible that made all the difference in his heart and life. He developed a deep and abiding respect for the Bible. The words of our text this morning, Jesus own words encouraging us in our attitude toward His Word lead us to a deeper appreciation of -

**THEME: Reformation Respect for the Word.**

The opening words of our text address the first and primary mark of true respect for Scripture.

**John 8:31-32** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

Jesus is addressing Jews who **had** believed in Him, but their faith had wavered. He directed them, to the Scriptures that they ought to

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## 1. Continue in Jesus' Word.

The Jews were very serious about the Old Testament Scriptures. They didn't commonly have copies of the Scriptures sitting in their homes, but that didn't stop them from learning the Word. They were careful listeners of the Word as it was read in the synagogue. In their youth they were instructed carefully in the Scriptures and committed many passages to memory. Throughout their lives they listened to the Scriptures carefully and intensely enough that if they weren't intentionally memorizing the Scriptures they were so familiar with the writings of Moses and the prophets that it almost amounted to memorization.

They knew what the Scriptures had to say, and they went to hear the Scriptures read, so Jesus' point went even farther in urging them to **abide** in the Word. They were to bring the Word into their daily lives, as the psalmist asserted in our Old Testament lesson this morning, so that the Word would be their "**meditation all the day**", and His Word would be that "**lamp to their feet and light to their path**" (Psalm 119:97, 105) that we all need in this life. . They were to find the words of Scriptures to be the wisdom that gave heavenly direction to their lives and guided them through the perplexities of this life to the path of life that is Christ.

How different would life be for us if we didn't have a Bible in our homes? Think about that a bit. I would hope that for all of us it would be a dramatic and tragic difference and a real loss. I fear that some would feel a greater sense of disruption and impact on their lives if they lost cable or their internet connection than if they no longer had a Bible in their homes. We need to think about this as we consider whether or not we have been continuing in Jesus' Word as we might, as we ought. Surely there is room for improvement for us all, even for those who have daily devotions. More time and thought could and should be spent with the Word, and we all could be spending time taking it to heart and memorizing the Scriptures, as people did much more commonly in generations of the past.

We need to hold to the Word in those times of pressure and distress in life. That is when our faithfulness in hearing and studying the

Word makes such a huge difference. It is the Word that comforts us, and strengthens us to face the challenges life in this world will throw at us, and the distress that sickness and the problems of life bring upon us.

Martin Luther set us a wonderful example of holding to the Word. He faced many troubles and challenges in life. He and his wife, Kate, lost a child, and they found comfort in the Word of God. There were wars and rebellions, that assaulted the German states so that people Luther knew lost their lives, and the Turks invaded, with their forces reaching the very borders of the German empire. Hard times and difficult days were surrounding them and sweeping over them. Through it all Luther continued in the Word!

Luther kept the Word as part of the family dinner table. Indeed the devotional talks Luther had at the dinner table with family and friends are among his most treasured writings. However, the incident that stands out above the rest was when Luther was summoned by Emperor Charles V of the German states to defend his writings before the diet of Worms.

Luther had expected a presentation, a debate, and defense of his writings that had been published. Instead, Luther was presented with a straightforward command, “Recant!” Luther was told that he was to recant all of his writings that had been laid out before him on the table as Luther stood before Emperor Charles. When Luther tried to point out that there were many different types of writings covering many subjects that were not even in dispute, he was cut off! The command was repeated, “**Recant!**” That means a lot more than just taking back what was written, or withdrawing pamphlets and tracts and books from publication or distribution. It means that Luther was to publicly confess that his writings were FALSE! Even though he had traveled to Worms with the assurance of safe passage, everyone there understood that Luther’s life was on the line. Many of Charles advisors were encouraging him to burn Luther at the stake even as his grandfather Charles the IV had burned John Huss for presenting similar teaching. If Luther were to refuse to obey the Emperor’s command he would fall under his wrath!

The next day, after a night spent in prayer, Luther delivered his response to Emperor Charles. **“Unless ... I am convicted by the Scripture ... my conscience is captive by the Word of God. Therefore I cannot and will not recant. ... God help me. Amen.”**

These are the words of a disciple of Jesus, a true disciple named Martin Luther, and they show us exactly what it means to continue in Jesus’ Word. These words from Luther’s mouth when he was under great pressure and duress shine as a clear and wondrous example for us, the children of the Reformation.

Luther’s words reflect not only a respect for the words of Scripture, but also that these holy writings present the absolute truth of God, and of our salvation. He demonstrated a --

## **II. Respect for the Truth of Jesus’ Word.**

Jesus promised :

**John 8:32 “You shall know the truth”**

This passage is misquoted and misapplied by so many in the world. People in congress love to quote this passage in reference to congressional hearing! The very people who scoff at the truth of God’s Word are the ones who like to talk about truth setting people free, but they don’t want to confess that the Word of God is true. They are talking about man’s perception of truth. They are talking about what they **think**, what they **feel**, what they **like to hear**, what **science demonstrates**, what **society maintains**, virtually anything and everything that is apart from Scripture. Then, after they have “redacted” everything in the Bible that contradicts their standard of truth, they will admit that there is some truth, (maybe) to be found in the Bible, just as there is some truth to be found in the sacred writings of Islam and Hinduism.

It is the Word that is true! Jesus’ Word is true, and we are not referencing only those words of our Lord which might appear in red letters in some editions of the Bible. We are referencing all of His Word. Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. All of the Bible from Genesis through Revelation is Jesus’ Word, presenting Jesus and the TRUTH about God, and the truth about man’s fall into sin, and our deliverance from sin in Christ Jesus. As we continue in the

Word we grow in understanding the truth of God's Word as the Spirit opens our minds to comprehend the Scriptures. The certainty that what we are reading and hearing as we are instructed in the Word grows. We are ever more confident that what the Lord says to us in His Word is true and reliable. It will bring us all that Jesus promised, that we might --

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### **III. Treasure the Freedom His Word Proclaims.**

Jesus told those Jews who had believed on Him that if they would only stay with all that the Word taught them, they would find the freedom that they desperately needed.

**John 8:32** "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

They recoiled at Jesus' words of promise. They were not willingly to acknowledge in the slightest that they needed to be liberated. They were Abraham's descendants! They were not slaves to anyone. Jesus' response is critical to understanding the seriousness of sin. Sin isn't a free choice. It doesn't offer a free choice! Sin isn't simply an individual deciding to direct his own life as he sees best to serve his own interests and desires, even though many feel that is what they are doing. Sin enslaves the soul. It forces people to serve sin by their continued actions. It enslaves the soul with guilt and shame. It enslaves the heart with the fear of death, for "**The soul who sins shall die**" (Ezekiel 18:4)!

Luther understood this. Luther had experienced this slavery very personally. He wrote of his desperation in one of his hymns.

**TLH 387: 2** Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay, death brooded darkly o'er me, Sin was My torment night and day, In sin my mother bore; Yea, deep and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me."

By nature sin possesses the soul of every man. As long as the old Adam stills lives within us sin that still afflicts us in our lives, and makes clear for us that living in sin is not freedom. It is the oppression of guilt and shame, and a disruption of one's relationship with God. It casts us down and we are helpless to free

ourselves from this oppression. But Luther also presents the wonder of God's grace in that same hymn. We read.

**TLH 387:4,5** "But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's foundation. And mindful of His mercies great, He planned my soul's salvation. A father's heart He turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently; He gave His dearest Treasure.

"He spoke to His beloved Son 'Tis time to have compassion Then go, bright Jewel of My crown, and bring to man salvation; From sin and sorrow set him free, Slay bitter death for him that he May live with Thee forever."

That's the truth that sets us free. It is the truth of a gracious and loving God who cared for us from eternity. He cared for us not only as a mass of humanity who needed help. He cared for us as individuals. He knew you and me before the world was created. He loved us and desired our salvation. He sent His Son into the world to be our brother. Jesus willingly came into this world and bore our sin, and its guilt and condemnation. He took all away, bearing it to the cross! By His death and resurrection Jesus destroyed the power of death, and set us free that we might live with Him forever. That is the truth, and that is how it has set us free. And what a difference that makes in our lives. What joy it brings to all the children of God! Luther knew that joy, and rejoiced in God his Savior. Luther would encourage us to join in his expression of love and respect for Jesus. This is the song of the true disciple!

**TLH 387:1** Dear Christians one and all rejoice, with exaltation springing And with united heart and voice and holy rapture singing, Proclaim the wonders God hath done, How His right arm the victory won; Right dearly it hath cost Him.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.