

"The Truth"

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-39

October 30, 2011 - Reformation Sunday

I was really surprised this past week as I was doing some reading in preparation for writing this sermon to read an article by Professor David Lose. How he started his article was not the kind of thing that I ever thought I would hear from a Lutheran Seminary professor writing about what to preach about on Reformation Sunday. This is a high holy day in the Lutheran tradition ... 95 thesis nailed to the door of a church in Wittenberg sparking a reformation and ultimately the birth of the Lutheran church. Red paraments adorning our worship space signifying a uniquely special celebration. It is big stuff for Lutherans - but this is what Professor Lose had to say at the beginning of his article: "I'm going to give it to you straight. This Reformation Sunday, I don't want to hear a sermon about Martin Luther. I don't want to hear about how great the Reformation was. And I definitely don't want a history lesson. What do I want? The truth, straight up."

It is a pretty provocative thought. I am sure that you are really saddened by the thought of not hearing another sermon about Martin Luther and the Reformation {although as I think about it I can not remember focusing on either for many years}. Still it is a provocative thought - skip the history and the celebrations that we mark on this day and just tell the truth. He caught my attention. What could that mean - tell the truth? What is the truth? Don't we always tell the truth? I always love finding a way to weave together the themes of Reformation Day with Confirmation and even Halloween. I don't think that I have ever knowingly lied about any of those things in a sermon. But now I am forced to consider what the real 'straight up' truth is and tell it.

I study the scriptures and try to see what this truth is that I am supposed to tell. It was clear that the professor was taking his lead from the Gospel text "If you continue in my word you will know the truth and the truth will make you free!" It is a great and familiar line. And as I read the text I was immediately struck by the lie that follows. 'We have always been free ...' say the Jews who heard Jesus that day. Lie I wondered who they were trying to kid. Their whole history had been filled with slavery ... Enslaved to Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Rome. No, they have not always been free and they know it But worse yet, they don't see that Jesus is talking about something deeper ... A different slavery and a different / more important freedom. I think that it is that slavery and that freedom that Jesus is talking about when He invites us to confront the truth. Do you know the truth? Do you know that you are a slave to sin? Do you want to deny the reality of our slavery to sin?

As I was trying to get a handle on this business of telling the truth I ran into a video that was quite striking. I want to share it with you. It is simply entitled "The Truth" and frankly, as I began to listen to what it had to say, it was really depressing. It is 'straight up' - no holds barred - hit you between the eye word of truth from the authors perspective. I could argue with some of the theology I would like to try to soften it's words a bit in the

beginning But I challenge you to listen to it closely and see what you think - and perhaps more importantly, listen to what you feel as it plays out.

{Play You Tube Video - "The Truth [Vertigo]"}

How did you feel? As I watched it for the first time, I found myself sliding into a deep sadness through the first half of the message. {I apologize to those of you listening on the radio and could not see how the message was just read backwards phrase by phrase for the second half}. If you spend any time looking on the Internet at You-Tube videos, you know that there is a way for people to leave comments on the videos. One comment on this video was simply, "Wow, how did they do that?"

It is a good question far beyond the simple question of how someone could figure out wording that could be reversed in such a way to totally transform the message. It is even a more profound question to ask how such a transformation could be brought about in our world. But in the two halves of the video I believe that we have revealed the truth as the scriptures for today what us to hear it.

What is the truth? Answer - we are slaves to sin. We are so caught up in it that we simply can not break free and that sin will destroy us and our world. That is the truth - straight up. I hate it. I would love to deny it. I would love to say that we have never been slaves to anyone or anything. But, if I have to really tell the truth, that is it. We and the world around us are slaves to sin. We can try hard to break free. We can go through the rite of confirmation and say that we will follow God and keep the commandments - and it is a good thing to do at the end of confirmation instruction - it is a good thing to reaffirm time after time in our lives. But the truth is that we are trapped in sin and we will falter and fail in the life that we want to live.

But there is a second half to the video - a second truth that is really at the heart of the scriptures. That truth turns the first truth on it ear. That truth is a word of hope and grace that changes everything. That truth sets us free.

I find myself thinking about the situation into which Jeremiah wrote our first scripture lesson for today. What you have to know when you hear that text is that it was a terrible time in the history of God's people. God had made a covenant with the people but the people were so caught up in their slavery to sin that they simply could not stop turning away from God and living an egotistical, sin filled life. That life began to destroy them and finally they found themselves destroyed as a nation and living in exile as slaves to a foreign power. Everything had fallen apart for them and it seemed as though God, Himself was giving up on them. Over and over the people began to believe that there was no hope and they were ready to formally turn away from their belief in God. There at what would have to have been one of the lowest moments in the life of God's people God sent his prophet to share this word with the people. In essence what God tells the people is that He know everything. He knows the failings of the people and that they will always continue to go their own way. But God would not abandon them. God would be their God no matter what. No matter what, God would not abandon them.

I thought that maybe we should have sung "Just As I Am" - it tells the truth. The only way we come into this whole picture is 'just as I am - we don't have one plea. But by grace - God turns it all around. To all of us - those confirming their faith and all of the rest of us, this is the truth. God is at work. We are enslaved. The video almost makes it sound like we can turn things around - but it is not us. It is God - it is grace! Grace floods over us by no merit of our own and it can not be stopped. That is the truth. AMEN