**John 8:31-36 October 30, 2022 (Reformation Day)**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, John chapter 8 here re-reading these words. “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

President Matthew Harrison, who may be nearing the end of his tenure as President of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, loves Martin Luther. If you’ve ever read any of President Harrison’s books, or even just heard him speak in a sermon or interview you’ll find that he is a Luther scholar, he quotes Martin Luther often, knows Luther’s theology very well and can also cite many instances that were important in Martin Luther’s life. President Harrison is a faithful man, and also a bold man, who even went before Congress to defend religious freedom. Being bold is to be understood as being synonymous with being Lutheran. After all, without Martin Luther, there would be no Lutheran Church. Martin Luther’s boldness in the face of being told to recant is what fuels us as Lutherans to stand boldly on the proclamation of the Gospel, and the true teaching of God’s Word that we are free from sin’s bondage, and that we are in fact children of God our Heavenly Father.

But our worship is never centered on an LCMS President, a Michigan District President, or even Martin Luther himself. We worship our Triune God, and we always speak about Jesus. Yet on Reformation Day, we do focus on Martin Luther for a time to show his boldness and to learn from his example, to recognize the work he did in his life which was filled with so much joy and so much sadness. When it comes to Martin Luther we sometimes set aside one service of the year to celebrate his work in this the Lutheran Church. As Lutherans I’m sure you’ve learned some things about his life and about how he came to Reform the Church. Some interesting tidbits about Martin Luther’s life that you may not have heard about as often is that he at one point stabbed himself with a sword, also that Augustinian Monks at that time would wake up early to worship, nap during the day and wake up and worship again. Luther also went on a trip to Rome and had expectations of it being a wonderful trip viewing relics of the faith, only to be disappointed by how everything seemed to be shallow and monetized. We celebrate on Reformation Day how Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses, but this was not a spark to destroy and break away from the Church, he simply wanted to debate on the sale of indulgences. He was hoping that the Church would come to a better understanding about this practice, he never meant to break away from it. The boldness of Martin Luther was on full display at the Diet of Worms, where he stood before Earthly and Spiritual authority, and instead of recanting, he boldly proclaimed, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason – for I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything.”

Which is why this Lutheran Church stands today, boldly proclaiming the Gospel and the truth of God’s Word. From our Epistle lesson in Romans chapter 3, words I’m sure you’ve heard before but that must be repeated so that we never forget how salvation has come to us in this world. “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.”

Paul’s words here in His epistle to the Church in Rome, is bold. Bold words that speak of our sinful depravity and the love of God that has saved us. It takes someone who is very bold to say “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” It takes someone bold to stand up to the Church, to teach and preach against false doctrine. It’s something that we respect and admire about Martin Luther. He was bold. He told it like it was. There was no sugar coating anything in the life of Luther, He was bold at times even to a fault from looking back on his life. He was bold in his piety, the Augustinian order was one of the strictest to be a monk and yet he even went so far as to drive the priests crazy by constantly coming to Confession. He was bold in debate, with a biting sense of humor and wit that would drive his opponents no doubt crazy, as debates in those days didn’t just last a few hours or even 1 day, but a debate would even go on for weeks. He was bold obviously in his defiance in the face of the authority of the Church, who told him to stop talking, stop writing, and recant what he was saying about indulgences and salvation without citing one word of Scripture against him. He was bold in burning the papal bull, knowing it meant excommunication. He was bold in the face of authority that did declare him an outlaw who could be killed on sight without consequence. He was a very bold man.

But as we said before, we don’t worship Luther the man on this day, even though we remember him. Although we are Lutherans, which by the way was a derogatory term for followers of Luther’s teachings about God’s Word and salvation at the time, meaning that you were one who was breaking away from the established Church, we are not disciples of Martin Luther. We don’t put a statue of Luther up in the middle of our Church or pray to Luther to forgive our sins. He is not worshipped as a saint with supernatural power, and to be fair if he heard me speaking so much about him and his life in this very sermon he probably would be very upset. Luther ultimately found his boldness, proclamation, and purpose in life in the work of the Holy Spirit, who pointed not to his own works but found salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So what was the Reformation all about? What is our church all about? If we are Lutherans and it’s not all about Luther, what or who is it all about? It was the tag line and motto for the 500th celebration of the Reformation now 5 years ago, and it should be etched in stone because this particular phrase sums up our lives and it won’t ever change; “It’s *Still* all about Jesus.” We are called to be bold, bold to speak the truth as Luther did, but especially to speak about Jesus. The proclamation of Jesus, the message of salvation, the Gospel and Word of God in the lives of the Church being proclaimed in boldness to a world that is hostile to it. What was Luther fighting against? The idea that the work of Jesus Christ could be buried or put coequal with our own efforts, or even the idea that the Church could hand out forgiveness in the form of a piece of paper. That forgiveness and life could be bought with gold or silver when it was ultimately bought with Jesus Christ’s own blood. What did Jesus himself say? “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” And of course what we heard in our Gospel lesson. “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

You know the truth, you have studied it, learned it, and been blessed to read it clearly in God’s Word. But are you bold? Do you speak it boldly? Do you know it enough to teach it? Martin Luther stood in the face of earthly authority and didn’t recant. Jesus Christ himself stood in the presence of Pontius Pilate, and King Herod, and wouldn’t say anything to save himself, but submitted himself to death on the cross. And sure we are bold, around fellow Christians, here in God’s house we loudly proclaim the truth of what we believe in the creeds and sing the glorious hymns of the Reformation out loud for all to hear. But around family? Friends? Those of other faiths? Are we bold? Or quiet? Do we tiptoe around our faith? Do we sugarcoat the harder doctrines of our Church that other faiths might disagree with or take exception to? Do we talk in generalities when it comes to God, sin, and salvation? And then what about when we are around those who are hostile to the Gospel? Those who openly question or instigate argument? Do we boldly speak in the face of the lies of sin and instead speak the truth? Or are we timidly quiet and silent on the things that matter the most?

Our slavery to sin, from the moment of birth, the reality that we are all born sinful and unclean, that we all have sinned should not shackle us in guilt for the rest of our lives. It should not handicap us from seeing the world through bars of imprisonment, or the idea that we have to save ourselves through our own actions. For we know the truth, and we have been set free. We know the truth of the Gospel for we have seen the very personification, the person, the walking and talking Son of God, the Gospel and Word made flesh before our eyes. We have seen and held his body, we have tasted his blood. We have heard the witness of the apostles of His wondrous and miraculous works, and how He went to the cross to die for our sins. We have seen God’s undeserved love in Jesus, and how because of God’s grace, Jesus came, Jesus died, and Jesus set us free. Now we are justified, declared not guilty in our lives of sin, by his grace as a gift. A wondrous gift that can’t be earned or bought by anything that we do, from works of penance to any indulgence the Church could print and guilt us into buying. We have been bought back from sin, death, and our enemy the devil with the very blood of Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as the payment for sin, the means of making things right with him, and that we receive through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Which makes us bold. Which leads us to repentance in the times we’ve been timid because the truth. Which gives us the hope and knowledge that in the times that we do speak it is not us who boldly speaks of the Gospel but the Holy Spirit that speaks through us. Martin Luther was an amazing man but ultimately He was an imperfect instrument just like you, and just like me. We are all members of God’s body, used for His purpose in this world. Just as Luther was, just as President Harrison is, and any other person in authority whether they recognize that power coming from God or not. We are used for his purpose until He calls us home. To the place where we remain in the Lord’s house with the Son of God forever.

To sum it all up yes, It’s Still All About Jesus. 505 years later. 5,000 years later. It will never stop being all about Jesus. No matter what the Church always comes back to Christ for without Christ there is no hope and no life. Luther discovered this, and we thank God for the work that He did. But may our praise and honor always remain fixated on the very Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and the sin of the world. So that we may declare the wonderful discovery of Martin Luther in hymns and songs, and live in the hope of eternal life, the truth of the Gospel, and the love of God for us shown in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.