

Reformation

John 8:31-36
Free Indeed!!

What comes to mind when I say the word “*freedom*”?

Maybe you imagine an eagle gracefully gliding on an updraft.

Or maybe you think of that feeling after your last day at work before holidays begin.

Or maybe for you it’s the thought of waking up on a Saturday with absolutely nothing on your **To Do List**.

Perhaps in light of what’s happen around the globe.

Freedom means “free from deadly disease”.

Freedom means to practise your faith as you wish.

Freedom means living your life in dignity.

I did an image search in **google** on the word “*freedom*”.

I found it interesting.

That the most common image.

Was of a person standing somewhere in nature with their arms raised as if in praise.

In today’s Gospel from **John**.

Jesus is having a conversation with some religious leaders.

About slavery.

And freedom.

Jesus will challenge their notions about both.
And ours as well.

John 8:31-36.

Jesus is talking to Jews who had come to believe in him as the Messiah.
The Saviour from God.
The Deliverer.

Jesus promises that three things.
Will be true of them.
If they'll continue in his word.

First.
They will truly be his disciples.

Second.
They'll know the truth.

Third.
The truth will set them free.

But these disciples.
Are offended.
By the implication that they are lowly slaves.
And deny that they have ever been enslaved.

That.
Of course.
Isn't true.

Not only were they slaves in Egypt.
And in Babylon.
In different periods of their history.

They are.
In a sense.
Enslaved by the Romans at that very moment!

The point here.
Is that their pride.
And their self-righteousness.
Blinds them not only to their physical reality.
But also to their spiritual condition.

And it's their spiritual condition.
Which Jesus is referring to.

Jesus says.
That anyone who sins.
And that's everyone.
Is a slave of sin.

Those first century disciples just didn't get it.

They didn't understand what Jesus was saying.

The more important question for us today.
Is.

Do we?

Let's hear Jesus' words spoken to us.

It all begins here.
Where Jesus says...
"If you continue in my word."

The question is.
What does it mean to continue in Jesus' word?

We might assume it means to read the bible every day.
But while that's certainly not a bad idea.
It's also certainly not what Jesus had in mind.

Let's remember that when Jesus spoke these words.
And when John wrote his gospel.
The bible as we know it.
Didn't exist.

So.

What does it mean to continue in Jesus' word?

In *John*.

Jesus is the Word made flesh.
Who has come to dwell among us.

And so.

In *John*.

To continue in Jesus' word means.
To live in relationship with Jesus.
To allow our lives to marinate in the core message of his life.
Death.
And resurrection.
The message that we are.
By grace through faith.
Unconditionally loved.
And forgiven.

To continue in Jesus' word.

Is what Paul was praying about in his letter to the *Ephesians*...

“I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the

power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

That is what it means to continue in Jesus’ word.

So let me ask you...

Are you continuing in his word?

Are you continually being rooted and grounded in God’s love and forgiveness?

How would you know?

Let me suggest a few indicators.

People who are rooted and grounded in God’s love.

And forgiveness.

Aren’t easily offended.

And when they’re offended.

They very quickly forgive.

And let go.

They aren’t enslaved by their grudges.

People who are rooted and grounded in God’s love.

And forgiveness.

Are less often judgmental of others.

They don’t often feel the need.

To be critical of the way that others think and act.

They aren’t enslaved.

By the need to put others down.
In order to feel lifted up.

People who are rooted and grounded in God's love.
And forgiveness.
Don't tend to be enslaved by the opinion of others.

They tend to be secure.
And at peace.
With themselves.
Because they dare to believe that they are secure and at peace with God.

True disciples are people who.
By grace through faith.
Are rooted and grounded in God's love and forgiveness.

They believe.
That they belong to Jesus Christ.
That nothing will ever be able to separate them from God's love and forgiveness.
And so they are free.

They are free.
From defining themselves.
By what they own.
By what they achieve.
By what others think of them.

They are free.
From pretending to be more than they really are.

And they are freed for a life of loving and serving others.

We live in a culture.
That defines freedom as being able to do whatever we want.

Whenever we want.

But that isn't real freedom.

It's just another form of bondage.

And it certainly isn't the freedom that Jesus is referring to today.

Living in the freedom that Jesus is referring to.

Actually takes courage.

More courage than many of us have.

The ***Shawshank Redemption***.

Is one of my favourite movies of all times.

One of the characters in the movie

Is a man named Brooks Hatlen.

After spending 49 years behind bars.

Hatlen is released.

He's set free.

But Brooks Hatlen can't handle freedom.

It frightens him.

After 49 years of prison.

He feels safer behind bars.

So much so.

That he eventually takes his own life.

The freedom.

That Jesus proclaims today.

Can frighten us like that.

We're afraid to let go of our grudges.

For fear of being hurt again.

We're afraid to let go of our critical, judgmental spirit.
Because we're not sure who we are.
If we're not better than someone else.

And we're certainly afraid to spend our lives for the needs of others.

Even though Jesus said.

We have to lose ourselves before we really find ourselves.

That's a gamble we're not so sure we want to take.

And so we often prefer our bondage to sin.
Rather than the freedom that Jesus Christ offers.

But maybe today.
You feel the Holy Spirit moving in you.
And you're tired of bondage.

Maybe you're feeling more like Andy Dufresne,
The main character in **The Shawshank Redemption**.
Who is willing to risk it all.
To escape the bars of his imprisonment.

Maybe today.
Your soul longs for real freedom.
Not the kind of freedom our culture offers.
But the freedom that Jesus Christ offers.
The freedom that Luther experienced.
The freedom to surrender your life completely
Into the unconditional love and forgiveness of God.
And the freedom to give your life away for the sake of others.

If that's where you are today then.
Let me share two things with you.

First.

You are loved unconditionally.

You are fully and completely forgiven.

Every prison door in your life has been opened.

You are free!!

That's the good news.

It's a done deal.

Believe it.

Dwell in it.

Live it.

Second.

We all have days

When we feel more like Brooks Hatlen.

Than we do like Andy Dufresne.

We all have days.

When the freedom that Jesus proclaims frightens us.

And we're tempted to run back into the bondage of self-focused living.

When we experience fear or doubt.

When we experience pain or rejection.

When we feel ourselves to be unlovable or unforgivable.

Rather than running away from those feelings.

Or beating ourselves up for them.

We are invited to surrender those feelings to God.

I'd encourage you to give it try.

Because.

Jesus came proclaiming freedom to all captives.

The truth of God's love.

And forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Has set us free.

And if the Son has set you free.

You are free indeed.

Amen.