**Reformation 2017 – Commemoration of 500 years of the Reformation**

**John 8:31-36**

31Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” 34Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

**BACKGROUND:**

John’s Gospel is distinct from the synoptics and unique in its presentation of the spiritual mystery that is seen and made known through Jesus. John’s Gospel begins not with a birth narrative or wilderness wandering but in the eternity before creation comes into being, a place where the intimacy between God and the logos is manifest and then takes on new meaning as the logos becomes incarnate. The Gospel is constructed around a series of signs, beginning with the wedding at Cana and ending with the raising of Lazarus, both stories unique to John. Authorship is unknown, and a dating of between 95-100 seems appropriate given the reflections in the Gospel that reflect the tensions between Jews and Christians following the Jewish revolt of 666-70 AD. The pericopie under consideration here draws alarming distinctions between Judeans and Disciples, as well as between believing disciples who set their trust in Jesus and those who are disciples in name only.

VERSE BY VERSE:

VS WHO DOES JESUS ADDRESS?

Vs 30 Many who trusted in him – episteusan eis auton

Vs 31 Judeans who had believed in him – pepisteukotas auto

The crowd is “MIXED” in terms of faith and relationship to Jesus

Continue in my word – Literally Make YOUR HOME in my word. The Word is not a mere set of instructions, but source of life, a home, into which we invite the world, visitors, strangers etc Note how differently Jesus accusers use the Torah & Prophets against him, as a sword, bludgeon, hammer.

TRUE DISCIPLES alethos. The test is not a task, or a religious rite or even a defense of some argument or legal question = traditional rabbinic tests, it is the matter of abiding in the Word ie an ONGOING CONTINUING ACTIVITY. Discipleship that is a title alone is nothing unless it becomes a habit, abiding in the word leading to a deepening relationship with Jesus.

VS 32 Know the Truth – Truth will set you free

TRUTH for John is not an abstract idea, a philosophical ideal – Jesus is the” way, truth and life” – specifically it is what God, present in Jesus is actually doing. All other truth is derivative of that one truth.

FREEDOM for John is the forgiven and reconciled relationship with God that comes to us through Jesus Christ. Because of such reconciliation we are free to live as Jesus lives, without fear, for others, in loving service toward friend, stranger and enemy.

Vs 33 Descendants of Abraham – a genetic/ethnic heritage. My identity is determined by my tribe or nationality and nothing else. It is a statement that some believe they already have all that is necessary to know God apart from Jesus. They need nothing more, they come to Jesus complete, whole, without need of forgiveness, UNABLE to hear/receive the Truth.

This EXHORTATION is addressed not merely to the JEWS but to ALL believers who might seek truth apart from the freedom it brings.

Vs 34 Very truly – Amen, Amen A Clarion call to listen up, pay attention

Commits sin – chooses sin or the way of sin/wickedness personal sins that may be the consequence of SIN as human condition, as opposed to choosing the way of holiness seen in Jesus. To follow Jesus as disciple is to walk his walk of love and mercy. The choice is more than singular acts of sin, slippages, but living a life of sin. Here the Jesus of Matthew cautioning against adultery as looking at another lustfully differs from the Jesus of John who sees active behaviors more condemning than attitudes of the heart alone.

Slave to sin = occasional behaviors becoming habit, lifestyle perhaps best revealed by the oft heard phrase “I can quit anytime I choose”. This is source of our Lutheran phrase “in bondage to sin” that is matched by the declaration of absolution as external word that sets us free.

Vs 35 slave does not have a place – In ancient Rome while slaves held quarters in the house of master/owner they had no place in the home, ie did not participate in any of the benefits, such as security, inheritance, heritage, social position etc. Specifically the slave has no standing to set themselves free. Even were they to save up enough money to purchase their freedom, they have no standing to do so, slave status is a non-person category as are enemies, foreign tribes, other nationalities, Gentiles etc in Ancient thought.

SON – ho huios – has standing in the family place in the home, capacity to set slaves free. He can pay the price, and make the proper declaration because of his standing. What the slave says makes no difference, what the son says, becomes reality, in the home and beyond.

VS 36 You will be free indeed - For John the same Son who speaks the cosmos into being (1:1ff) now speaks the slave into freedom, and each disciple to our proper place in the Father’s home/Kingdom ALL via Jesus Christ and the truth he brings.

THEOLOGY:

“Lord Jesus Christ your power make known, for You are Lord of Lords alone, Defend your Holy Church that we may sing your praise triumphantly. “ May we be so humbled by the Truth of God in Christ that our triumph is not a celebration of past ecclesial battles won, but hope in his ultimate victory over sin, death and the evil one.