

“Freed by Grace Alone”

John 8:31-36

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Christ,

Freedom isn't free, at least, that's the way the tag line typically goes. We'll hear all about it in a couple of weeks as we celebrate Veterans Day, and it is said often around days like Memorial Day. Freedom has a price, and it is paid by those who face the enemy head on, running into the teeth of the lion. And while it isn't exactly a wrong statement, as we gather together today to observe the Reformation Day Festival, our minds are turned to the reality that while freedom in the worldly sense is not free, the grace of God in Christ Jesus certainly is freely given. That truth is one of the hallmarks of the Reformation itself—*Sola Gratia*.

There is a price that is paid for that grace, but it isn't one that is paid by you. You are justified freely by the grace of God for the sake of Christ, who died the death you deserve and has freed you from the power of sin, death, and the devil. The bonds which once held you in sin have been broken by the power of Jesus, and through faith alone, by His grace alone, according to His Word alone, you have been justified freely. And it is only for this reason that you are able to hold fast in the face of the evil one's attacks, because even he stands defeated by the Lord Almighty, thus rendering you freed by grace alone.

The key point in that freedom is that you have nothing to do with it, no matter how badly your sinful flesh wants you to be the one who wins the victory over the enemy. The Old Adam is not good at allowing credit to be given to others. Your works and deeds are nothing but evil in the sight of God, because anything you do that is your work and your deed is done out of selfish gain. Even those works and deeds you seemingly do for others do nothing more than bolster the ego of that old man, making you believe that you are earning some grace and favor in the eyes of God. Paul says in Romans 7:19, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” Because of the sin that all have inherited from Adam, you are no longer capable of truly good deeds on your own, no matter how much you desire to do good. Just like the price that needs to be paid for your freedom, you need someone to do that good work for you.

And as one who has been regenerated by the grace of Christ in Baptism, you do desire to do good, but the evil is still what you keep on doing. You are not able to stop sinning. Only in faith can you do anything that is good, but that work does not belong to you. Any good you do in faith is the work of Christ shining through you, as one who has

been made new by His grace alone. That's exactly what we will sing in our closing hymn, "With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected." Our might can do nothing for ourselves, because it is in fact not might, but weakness. And it is a weakness that our Lord knows intimately. The writer to the Hebrews records, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

The reason you cannot do any good is because of the weakness of the sinful flesh. You have no strength with which to do any good, because everything about who you are outside of Christ is sinful. Had Jesus not paid the price for your freedom, you would still be a slave to sin, and as Christ Himself says in our Gospel lesson, "Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." Every time you sin, you show that your nature is totally depraved and incapable of breaking the chains of that slavery. But "the slave does not remain in the house forever." You are not doomed to a life enslaved to sin because only "the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." You have been freed by the work of the Son, not your own, and because you are freed by His grace alone, you are no longer a slave to sin. For as the Apostle says in Romans 6:6, "We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."

Freedom from sin is yours because of your baptism into Christ's death. It is His death upon the cross of salvation that has redeemed you and made you righteous, "and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18)." More specifically, slaves to the righteousness of Christ, because it is He who dwells in you and works everything that is good within you or that comes out of you. Jesus is the only reason for your freedom. He willingly went to the cross, giving up His own life in place of yours. The price of your freedom was paid by His blood, so it is certainly not free, but it is indeed freely given. You who once were dead in sin, are now alive in Christ, and nothing can separate you from that truth. If you were responsible for keeping yourself in the faith, you would fall away and be left outside of the kingdom. The righteousness you now bear is yours by faith in the One to whom that righteousness belongs.

That righteousness by faith is what shields you from the flaming darts of the evil one. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking to devour you (1 Pet. 5:8). You cannot run fast enough to get away from him, nor does your sinful nature want you to run away from him. He feeds the desires of the flesh and those desires overcome you every day. No one is immune from the want to fulfill those lustful desires of the heart. And Satan knows how badly your sinful flesh wants those desires fulfilled, so he throws

everything he has at you to try and turn you away from the knowledge that you have been set free from those sinful desires. He tells you that the Lord wants you to be happy, so why would He keep you from doing what you want?

But you have the knowledge that “one little word can fell him.” Because of Christ and His righteousness, you have the ability to look the evil one in the eye and call him a LIAR. That is the one little word that Luther mentions in our closing hymn. Calling him a liar brings to light the fact that he has lost. The victory has been won over sin, death, and the devil, and so anything which he seeks to use to pull you down has no effect. You stand as one who is in the faith of Jesus Christ, faith in the One who shed His blood to buy you back from the clutches of Satan. No matter how hard he tries, he will never overcome the cross. He will never overcome the redemption that is yours in Christ Jesus. Your Savior has done everything necessary for you to overcome the devil and his wiles, because his defeat is sealed in blood, followed by an empty tomb.

The joy of victory in Christ is yours by faith, declared to you in the Word of salvation recorded for your edification. You have that victory because of His grace, freely given to you because of His love for you, not your love for Him. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).” Jesus bled, died, and rose to life so that you would die to sin, and be alive to God in Christ. You have the hope of salvation because of the concrete assurance that Jesus has given you by His death at Calvary. We preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23), because there is no other way that you can have the freedom that He has won for you. Being freed by grace alone means that you have received the undeserved kindness of your Lord and Savior, because the reality is that you deserve nothing but death and condemnation without Him.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).” There is no condemnation for you because He gave Himself up for you. He paid the price that was necessary for your salvation, becoming the all-atoning sacrifice that makes you righteous in the sight of your Heavenly Father. So, as you come to His table to receive His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, you come to receive the means by which you have been redeemed. You partake in the foretaste of the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which shall have no end. The whole host of heaven shares in this meal with you, the saints of all times and places, those you know and those you don’t yet know. For in the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns in glory, all will be reunited in body and soul and the full body of Christ will stand together as victors.

There is no work for you to accomplish for that truth to be yours. You have been freed by grace alone, and all the work has been done for you by Christ. He alone keeps you in the faith, and He alone has done the work to free you from sin. You look to Christ knowing that by His crucifixion and resurrection, you will join in the fulfillment of the marriage feast of the Lamb and His bride the Church. And by His Holy Word, He has revealed that reality to you. He speaks to you through His Word, and because of your Baptismal identity as a son of God, you hear Him as He declares you to be forgiven, thus receiving His grace. For that reason alone, you will stand before the Father at the judgment, confident in the truth that you have been declared righteous for Jesus's sake alone. You will enter into the heavenly kingdom, dwelling forever in the light of His glory—a glory beyond all comprehension—side by side with all the saints and in the loving grace of your Lord and Savior. Amen.