

Jesus calls every generation to His Word

Once a year, Lutherans celebrate the Reformation.

That was when our forefathers in the faith
rediscovered the true nature of what God teaches.

God was calling that generation of Christians to His Word,
and when some answered that call, it shook the world.

But the Reformation continued on.

In 1517, Martin Luther proposed 95 points for debate,
and the Christian world was divided:

was Luther correct, or was he in error?

The more he and his colleagues studied the matter,
the more convinced they became.

Meanwhile, the establishment felt threatened.

They took this as a challenge to their authority,
though the challenge came from *God's* Word, not Luther's.

So Luther, who only wanted to fix what was wrong,
was excommunicated by the Pope,
and condemned as a criminal by the Emperor.

That was just the beginning.

In time, some Lutherans and others began teaching new things,
contrary to holy scripture.

The same Martin Luther and his colleagues
had to defend their old faith against these new challenges.

Does Baptism truly have God's effective promise of rebirth?

Do Christians and non-Christians alike

receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper?

Does God truly forgive our sins through sinful pastors?

These questions and more arose again and again,
and each generation had to search the Scriptures.

The Reformation was a particular event, at a particular time,
but it was part of something greater still:

Christians returning to the pure and clear fountain of Israel,

the Word of God, written in the Old and New Testaments.
This returning must take place again and again,
as old errors and abuses resurface, and new ones creep in.
At stake is our certainty
of forgiveness,
of God's favor,
and of eternal life.

Jesus calls every generation to His Word
So that we might have truth (instead of falsehood or apathy)
So that we might have freedom (from sin, death, and Satan)

John 8:31–36

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

So that we might have truth

The verses around our text contain many attacks on Jesus, but some of His hearers believed His Words.

He invited and called upon them to continue:

**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free.**

There are two effects of abiding in the Word of God.

The first, Jesus said, is that we will know the truth.

In our day, some attack the notion of truth itself.

Anyone can claim that something is true.

Who am I to contradict you, or you to contradict me?

But that's the wrong question,

because it assumes that we are the makers of truth.

What is true remains true whether anyone believes it.

It remains true whether anyone knows it.

Though truth is outside of us, we can also know it,

because God has given us senses, reason, and words,

and He communicates to us in His Word.

If you abide in My Word . . .

then you will know the truth.

Since we can know what is true, we can also be wrong.

My opinion can't make you wrong,

but where you stand in relation to the truth

— *that* can make you wrong.

There are two things that contradict the truth.

The first is falsehood.

Our ability to reason, which is God's gift to us,

tells us that two contradictory things

cannot ordinarily both be true.

So any teaching contrary to what God has revealed

must be proven false.

Yet, since Jesus promised, **If you abide in My word . . .**

you will know the truth,

we can always use His Word as the measure of truth.

Our senses or our reason may seem to contradict it,

but God's Word will never be false.

We may be tempted to believe our senses instead,

or to trust some earthly teacher, or false reason.

But only Jesus' Word has the guarantee of truth.

The second thing that contradicts the truth is apathy.

If you don't care about what is true or false,

then you lost the battle before it began.

If you care more about something else,

so that you have no time or energy left for the truth,

then the truth will be no help to you.

You are who and what God has made you,

and if you lose His Word for lack of caring,

then you will receive only what your sins deserve.

On Reformation Day this year,

Jesus again calls this generation to His Word,
so that we may know the truth.

You may wonder sometimes what you can trust.

There is a general notion today that the Earth is warming up.
I've known that for some time.

The harbors of the Northeast used to ice over,
but it's been several decades now since that has happened.

But when you ask "*Why* is the earth warming up?"

Then you hear shrill voices in disagreement.

"Mankind is destroying the planet by using its resources!"
or, "It's part of a natural cycle that's always existed."

But who really has the truth?

Closer to home, there are several churches in our communities,
all claiming to follow Jesus Christ.

The Pharisees and Sadducees also claimed
to follow the true religion of Abraham and Moses,
but they also disagreed.

Some say, "It doesn't really matter which path you take,
because they all lead to the same destination."

I know that each of us is tempted to be soft on the truth.

Perhaps our friends and family members have gone another way.

Perhaps we don't want anyone under God's punishment.

Perhaps we'd rather feed our bellies and drink our beer
instead of caring and preparing for what tomorrow may bring.

Perhaps we don't like confrontation,
and if we care about the truth, we may have to defend it.

Whatever pulls us away from the truth,
it's pulls the wool over our eyes,
when we stand at the edge of a precipice.

What God performed among the Reformers in the 1500's
was pretty near miraculous.

They cared about the truth.

They defended it, even to the point of death.

They found comfort in it, with certainty.

Jesus called them to that truth in His Word,
and today He calls our generation.

**If you abide in My Word, . . .
you will know the truth.**

The wicked world will not accept it,
just as it crucified Jesus, the Word-made-flesh.

But the wicked world is wrong,
because it does not abide in the Word of God.

Do you see what a radical thing the Reformation is?

Not because it tries to change everything.

Not because it requires us to be enemies of others.

Not because it would destroy us for some cause.

The Reformation is radical
because it's diametrically opposed to sin.

Sin always tries to exchange the truth for a lie.

It always makes enemies of those who would be our friends.

It always tries to make us destroy ourselves for some cause.

But the Reformation would return us to our Creator:

to His Word, His divine favor in Christ,
to His promise and plan to give us eternal life.

So that the Reformation may live on today through you and me,

Jesus is calling this generation to His Word.

**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make
you free.**

So that we might have freedom

Jesus calls every generation to His Word,

so that we might have truth,

and so that we might have freedom.

Many remember only these words:

The truth shall make you free.

But out of the context of holy scripture,
those words don't mean much of anything.

Jesus told Martha,

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

He is our liberator,

because He has freed us from sin, from death, and from Satan.

The Christian Church is a glorious thing,

honored by God as the bride of Christ, God's Son.

But we don't see her glory.

Our physical eyes only see the buildings,
and the imperfect, guilty people who fill them.

We notice the controversies that seem to split her apart,
the budget deficits, the personal faults and strife.

Just when things look bleakest in our eyes,
those are the times when God is making her strong.

Such was the time of the Reformation,
and so it always is among those who abide in Jesus' Word.

Elijah had given up,
but God had reserved 7,000 in Israel,
whose knees had not bowed to Baal.

Today, even among those called "Lutherans,"
there are so few who actually care,
and who truly abide in the Word of God,
and who are willing to repent and forgive.

God has made us into a remnant,
with the task of remaining in His Word.

We may sometimes think all is lost,
and we may lose patience with God's people.

We may grow tired of the continuous cycle:
the embarrassment and terror of sin,
the humility of repentance,
and only then the peace of forgiveness.

We may decide we've had enough,
when God still has more in store for us.

But meanwhile, God builds and strengthens us,
as long as His Word remains on the earth.

You may know about the Luther Rose on our bulletin,
but did you know about the "VDMA" design?

The Prince of Saxony, a devout defender of the faith,
made it the sign of his household:

"Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum,"

Latin for: "The Word of the Lord Endures Forever"

(1 Peter 1:25) The rest of that passage says:

Now this was the word which by the Gospel

was preached to you.

The Word of the Lord is greatly abused on earth,
but it will never pass away.

And as long as it remains among us,
we may abide in it.

You might ask about the poor Church on earth.

Why do Christians bother,
if it seems so weak and troubled?

The answer is in our text.

**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free.**

Through His Word, Jesus gives us freedom,
a freedom that cannot be found, made or protected
in any other way.

Civil liberty is a great blessing,
and we have that blessing richly,
even written in a strong constitution.

But civil liberty is only good for one life,
and afterward we face death, the wages of our sin.

Jesus took our death upon Himself,
being punished on the bloody tree for our sins.

He went into battle against the tyrant of tyrants,
and gave His life so that we might escape.

Just when things seemed darkest and most hopeless,
when death had swallowed our Champion whole,
He rose again in victory.

The liberty we have now through His Word
is forgiveness for all our sins and transgressions.

It's freedom from the slavery of Satan,
and deliverance from the chains of death.

Martin Luther discovered that there's nothing,
nothing we can do to improve our standing with God.

But Jesus has done it all for us, every bit.

He said, **whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.**

That would apply to every one of us.

But He also said,

**If the Son makes you free,
you shall be free indeed.**

For this purpose He calls us to abide in His Word:
so that we might have this freedom.

The Reformation means that nobody can take away our comfort,
and nobody can take away our freedom in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes Christians give it up willingly,
ceasing to care about the truth, or embracing falsehood.

But nobody can take it away.

Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum:

The Word of the Lord Endures Forever.

Today, by that Word of Truth,
even through one such as myself,

Jesus has set you free.

You are forgiven.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!