The Festival of the Reformation (Observed)—October 25, 2026

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus said, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Martin’s Luther’s work, “The Freedom of the Christian” is one of his more well-known writings and proclaims many things about what the Christian truly has in Christ. The most famous lines from this work contain a beautiful statement. “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

Jesus speaks about freedom today in this reading from John 8. He does so in a way that invite us to see who we are in Christ and what we have been freed from by his work. The discussion starts off by stating something very important. He puts before them a reality of what it means to be a Christian in this world. Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The only way one can be free is to be a disciple of Jesus.

The Lord said this to some Jews who had believed in him. In a way, it’s as if Jesus said to them “You say you believe in me. What does this mean?” A similar question is placed before us today as we are sitting in this place hearing this word. “You say you are a Christian. What does this mean?” Jesus tells you, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

Christians, disciples, are those who hear the word of God. Don’t hear the word of God and there’s no Christian faith and there’s no freedom. It’s obvious as Jesus says that numerous times. It’s easy, though, for us to want to deflect this because we are here. We are sitting in this place hearing the word of God. Jesus isn’t preaching to random people either in the reading. He’s talking to those who had believed in him. So, this statement is one that is both an admonishment to us and words of comfort.

The first part is what Jesus said about “abiding in the word.” Real disciples, as opposed to false ones hear God’s word and abide in it. This word for “abide” is used all over the New Testament and is very rich in what it means. To abide in the words of Jesus means that this is where we remain and find our dwelling. There’s a comfortability in it in a sense that Christians are at home in the Scriptures, in God’s word, this is where we live. If something were to wake you up in the middle of the night and you had to find something in your home in the dark you would be able to do pretty well with getting to where you need to be and finding what you need to find. You are comfortable in your own home because this is where you abide, you remain there, and things are comfortable or familiar. “There’s no place like home.” That’s the sense of abiding and the same should be said of you and how you are with the word of God.

As you sit here today and listen to God’s word, hearing and listening are more than just a rear end sitting in a pew. It’s not something like getting checked off for attendance but an engagement and active listening to what the Lord is saying. Think about hearing, reading, and studying God’s word like being at your home. God’s word is to dwell in you richly. Abiding in God’s word is hearing it, believing it, and living it. It’s remaining in these things of God even if you must suffer for it because you know this is your home where you dwell. And this is a freeing thing because this is where God is at work and where he comes with words of peace and comfort and doesn’t leave things up for grabs. There’s a security here because the Lord is at hand and at work.

Martin Luther preaching on this text from John 8 said, “And now Christ begins to speak about the true and the false disciples of the divine Word: ‘Many hear the Gospel and remain with it for utilitarian reasons. They reap money, goods, and honor from it. My dear friends, who would not like that! For this reason I state: “If you continue in My Word and doctrine, you are truly My disciples.”For I have two types of disciples. The one group believes in Me; they praise and hear the Gospel and say: ‘This is the real truth.’ I regard them as great and fine Christians. It is all a matter of continuing. Then there are others who hear it; but when the battle grows hot, they declare: ‘Upon my soul, should I forsake this or that for the sake of the Gospel?’ There are few who remain true to the Gospel in the face of cross and

persecution. Where can one find those who are constant? Therefore I say that if you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples. If My doctrine pleases you, you are well schooled and know everything. And if you persevere in the doctrine through cross and suffering, then you are My disciples. But My doctrine demands more than just an initial acceptance and much praise. I know that it is easy to believe in the beginning. But where are those who remain steadfast, who persevere, endure, and say: 'Let come whatever God send me! If I am not to be well, then I am satisfied to be sick. If I am not to be rich, then I shall be content to remain poor. Whether I live or die, I shall remain with Christ'?"

The Lord calls you to abide in his word. He calls you to a new life in Christ which is found in and lives in him who is your head. Depart from the Scriptures and there will be slavery. You know you think about this in your life and in the lives of your family and friends and you see how these words of Jesus teach us all a lot. Lives that are regular in hearing the word of God and studying the Scriptures are lives that are subject to so many other voices, people, and thoughts in this world. Look at how often we can be swayed by what we hear on the news, from politicians, members of our family, friends, or whatever is the prevailing voice in our communities. At the drop of a hat, we will listen and believe those things and people, or we will just go along with them without question or real hard discernment. Yet we convince ourselves we're of a sound mind and we've done the research, or we know what's best for us and our lives. We kid ourselves that we are free to live and have never been slaves to anyone all the while our eyes and ears are glued to whatever comes up next and we are waiting on how we are proceed with our lives. But at the end of the day, we really have been a slave to the world and the devil who is the prince of this world and our sinful flesh which has either ignored or refused to hear God's word. We've lived our lives abiding not in God's word which is the truth and sets us free, but in what our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard.

Jesus draws the contrast between abiding in him and his word and the connection to sin which doesn't abide in him. Freedom is found in Christ whereas slavery is found in sin. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever." These harsh words show you the seriousness of abandoning Christ and his word. This is the opposite of what it means to abide in Jesus and his kingdom. Jesus isn't just saying everyone sins and so "oh well" it is what it is in a generic way. He's speaking about those who would remain or abide in their sin. Slavery to sin is a willful continuing in sin. It's refusing to repent and a live a life that continues to live contrary to God's word. It's a life that finds its identity, meaning, and security is that which is against God's word and thereby God himself.

In Romans 6 God says, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" When sin rules your life, you are living as a slave to it. There's no real freedom even if you may think you are living your life your own way. Slavery to sin leads to death and a slave has no place in God's house. God's house is for his children; his sons. When someone continues willingly in his sin, he is a slave and has rejected Christ and his freedom from those things. This is why Jesus calls all of us to repentance every day and to turn instead to his mercy and forgiveness found in Christ.

The freedom found in all of this is found in the one who took sin upon himself and forgives you of your sin. It's found in the one who has crucified you in the waters of baptism and raised you to new life. Jesus is the one who frees you. He takes you out of the devil's kingdom and into his own. He takes you out of slavery and into life in him. Freedom in Christ is about living a real new life. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

When you abide in Jesus, through faith in his word worked by the Holy Spirit, there really is freedom. You are free to live. You have a free conscience before God and you are free to live in this world and into eternity. Think about when you turn on the news and just pick whatever story you want; wars, conflicts, elections, the weather, or whatever, it doesn't matter. When you hear and know that Christ is for you and he has taken your sin upon himself and that you have been brought into an eternal kingdom that has no end, how are you going to look at everything you see around you? You are going to have peace because you see that Jesus has overcome the world. You know that you have been

set free from all this stuff around you and those things don't have any control over you and your life even if the devil wants them to and wants you to be anxious about those things and fear them. God's voice is the voice of freedom. His is the voice of life which looks even death in the face and says, "eh, I have eternal life, death can't harm me, I am no slave to it, I am a free man."

Free in Christ you are set free from sin and are free to live where God has called you in your church, family, and the world around you. You are free to be a hearer of the word of God. You are free to be a son, daughter, husband, wife, father, mother, or whatever station you may have in your family. You are free to serve your neighbor in the world around you. You are free because your sin is not counted against you and your righteousness is not obtained through your life and works. There isn't a burden to live in faith toward God and in love toward your neighbor. You have been set free in Jesus and given a new heart and mind that lives in this freedom. Even serving your neighbor is freedom because you have been crucified with Christ and your Lord serves his people as you love and serve one another just as your Lord "came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." Your orient your life in this way and what Luther says is true, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Dear Christians one and all, rejoice! You have freedom. Hear the words of Jesus and trust them. Your sin is forgiven and you have eternal life. One of the words for forgiveness in Greek is a word for "release or loosen." It's a word that takes something off of you and frees you from it. God has done this in Christ, and he has taken that burden onto himself and been crucified for you. Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated by Jesus who became a slave so that you would be and are his free people. Hear these words of freedom ring out into your ears, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. 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. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Christians are free. You are free. You belong to Christ and come what may in this life abiding in the Lord and his word you will always be free whatever the circumstances. Today we celebrate the festival of the Reformation and God places before your eyes Jesus who has saved you solely and completely by his grace alone through faith in him alone. There is no more freeing thing to celebrate this day and every day. Jesus has redeemed you and you are his by his grace. The Son has set you free, and you are free indeed now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.