

“Freedom is Only Found in Christ”

Luke 12:49-53

Jesus paints for us a bleak picture, yet one that is obviously a picture of the reality in which we live. There is not one family tree where you don't have to go too far out on the branches to find those who have forgotten the Name of the Lord. Members of my family as well as your family have chosen to ignore the Word of God and no longer have it as a lamp to their feet or a light to their path, as the Psalmist says.

A primary goal within our church is to have unity. All of our colleges within the LCMS are named Concordia – which is Latin for “concord, unity, oneness of faith.” It is in the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ – crucified for the guilt of my sin and risen from the dead for my salvation – this and this alone has brought me peace and freedom.

Satan has deceived the world, and our culture tells us that evil can be a liberating force in your life. That theme runs through music, movies, television. There are even Satanic groups now offering after school programs as an alternative (I'm not joking). The freedom found in the Gospel is the liberating force. We have the freedom from sin, not the freedom to sin. Through the Gospel, we are no longer slaves. Our world views the wild, untamed life of sin as an expression of free will.

In Adam's Fall, we lost our free will. We became slaves to sin. Only in Christ do we experience any liberation, any freedom. Our sins have been

forgiven. We are no longer slaves. Thanks be to God that He took my salvation out of the control of my will and took care of it Himself.

But the false notion in our society concerning the freedom supposedly found in individuality and expressing your own will is found in more than just songs on the radio. I have heard confirmation students say that they don't want to be good all the time, because they want to have fun. As if our life in Christ was dull; as if striving to do God's will is boring; as if being a good neighbor means not reaching the total potential that a person is capable of achieving.

How exactly does participating in that which is evil in the sight of God enhance a person's well-being? Every sinful act does harm either to yourself, your neighbor, or your relationship with God. Looking back at your life, ask yourself, "What benefit did I ever get by doing evil?" Ultimately, it brings trouble or sorrow. Now, there are times when you come back out of that pit and you see God fulfilling His promise to work all things for the good – thanks be to God. But don't jump into that pit assuming God will get you out and things will be so much better on the other side. You do not know how deep the pit is or how long you will stay there.

No matter how hard we try, there will be pitfalls along the way. All I'm saying is "Don't jump in." Freedom from the trouble and sorrow which sin brings – freedom from the pit – is true freedom. It only comes through forgiveness.

And when we walk away from this altar where we eat and drink the very body and blood of Christ broken and shed as the only sacrifice able to appease the wrath of the Judge who, as the Lord declared through the prophet Jeremiah (in our Old Testament lesson), fills heaven and earth, sees

all things so that no one can hide, even in the most “secret places” [Jer. 23:23]. After we walk away from the altar, after receiving that most precious gift of forgiveness and having our sins truly hidden from God, we are to see ourselves as having been forever changed. As I said last week, in Baptism we have been completely changed. We are made new, and we carry with us the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But just as we have been forever changed, so also we see that there are so many people who are walking in darkness without the Word of God as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. Their lives demonstrate an absence of God, a corruption of the good – inevitably, life in the pit.

Christ tells us that when He came, He did not bring peace, but a division in the lives of the people of this world. Our world, our nation, our city, our extended family and perhaps even the structure in which you live is a house divided.

Christ came to challenge even our most personal relationships. Elsewhere Jesus said, “whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Even if those who are closest to us live a life in the pit contrary to God’s will or have rejected God’s Word, it is our duty to stand up against their error and proclaim the truth. And we do this because we love them and God loves them – and we want them out of the pit.

The teaching of the church is not an exercise in moral judgments or opinions. The teaching of Christ’s church is a proclamation of the truth of God’s and is the only path to salvation.

The morality, or lack of morality, within our society has no bearing on God’s Word. Jesus did not come as a politician, have His disciples take a

poll of the Jewish people, and then reduce His teaching to the lowest common denominator acceptable to the majority. He came to proclaim the truth. Truth is a hard thing. Truth divides. Truth does not allow for shades of grey. Christ says: Good trees bear good fruit; bad trees bear bad fruit or no fruit at all. There is no in-between.

Our minds, our culture says “there are only shades of grey. There is no white light of truth. And a little bit of the darkness of evil mixed in isn’t all that bad anyway.” In our Old Testament lesson, God says, “My word is like a refiner’s fire that destroys all impurities. My word is like a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces” [Jer. 23:29].

God comes to us knowing that we all have impurities that need to be dealt with. He knows that we are never going to live up to His standard. The difference between those in God’s Word and those without God’s Word is having a light to help avoid the dark pitfalls makes the journey much better, and when you do stumble, having the willingness to be broken into pieces and refined removes the impurities. This is the beauty of confession and absolution. I, a poor miserable sinner have confessed my sin and have been forgiven by Christ Himself.

We are God’s creation. We are God’s redeemed people purchased at a price. God bought us out of our slavery to sin at the price of His Son’s body and blood. As the Psalmist says, “He drew me out of the pit . . . and set my feet upon a rock. This is His work in you. This is the truth of the Gospel, which has divided households, but which brings a true peace and unity and freedom to those who believe. Amen.