

Reformation Sunday

DESCENDANTS OF WHOM?

John 8:31-36

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Analysis by Bill White

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."

DIAGNOSIS: DESCENDANTS OF LUTHER?

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Not Living Lives that are Continuing in Jesus*

The power of tradition should not be underestimated. On this Reformation Sunday, could it be there are those among us who, like the Jews in our text, "had believed" in Jesus, but upon hearing Jesus' words about continuing, knowing truth, and being made free (vv. 31b-32), revert back to the identity, way, and security of our tradition. They too ask, "What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'? We are descendants of Martin Luther and American Lutheranism and have never been slaves to anyone. We were baptized and confirmed Lutheran. Our names are

on the membership role of the church. There is nothing amiss in the way we are living our lives.”

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not Knowing the Truth, Not Free*

There may have been a time when we thought we believed in Jesus. Perhaps we still pay lip service to believing in Jesus, after all, we are church members, we do go to worship regularly (relatively speaking), and we can and do say the Apostles’ Creed from memory. But when push comes to shove do we really know Jesus who is the Truth? Where, really, is our faith? For example, as we navigate these trying economic times, are we exposed as folk whose fear, love, and trust are actually in the security of our jobs, our investments, our retirement plans? Are we not slaves to sin, the sin of misplaced faith? Living lives of misplaced faith leaves us vulnerable. As the financial markets crash, so do our lives! We might even lose our homes!

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Homeless*

With nothing and no one to free us from our bondage to sin, losing our earthly home will be the least of our worries. Remember, Jesus said of those who are slaves to sin, “The slave does not have a permanent place in the household” (v. 35a). There are consequences here as to our eternal home...

PROGNOSIS: DESCENDANTS OF CHRIST

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *A Place Prepared in the Household*

But there is someone who can free the slaves to sin: “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (v. 36). Jesus is the son who has a permanent place in the household (8:35b). Jesus is the Word (1:1ff); Jesus is the way and the truth and the life (14:6); Jesus goes to prepare a place for his disciples (14:2); by his death on a cross and glorious resurrection, Jesus trumps the power of sin.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Knowing and Free*

The crucified and risen Jesus comes to us now, offering to take away our misplaced faith and replace it with real knowing: true fear, love, and trust in Christ. Faith in Jesus frees us from the power of sin and frees us to continue in Jesus' word. This kind of faith gives us truthful knowing, a way to keep the things of this world in perspective. Whether the stock market goes up or crashes, I remain in Christ. Whether my retirement savings goes up or is wiped-out, I continue in Christ. Whether I have a home I can afford or become homeless because I've been in one I could not afford, I abide in the household of Christ forever.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Continuing in Christ*

Truly living a life of faith in Christ is what we celebrate on Reformation Sunday. This is not faith without works. This is not faith that involves labels like "Lutheran." This is not a weak, lip-service-only faith, which when faced with the call to a life of committed discipleship retreats to the comfort of historic tradition. No, this is the faith proclaimed by Martin Luther – a living faith in Christ that manifests itself in one's daily living. It was faith in Christ that revealed the truth to Luther and this truth made him free. It was faith in Christ that enabled him to continue in Jesus' word. It was faith in Christ that empowered Luther's discipleship. It was faith in Christ that empowered Luther's reforms. And it is this same living faith in Christ that reveals God's truth to us, frees us from slavery to sin, and enables us to continue in Jesus' word. This living faith in Jesus enables us to endure all that the evil forces of this world hurl against us. What's more, this living faith in Jesus empowers us to be Christ's agents of reform in our world today.