

Reformation Sunday, Gospel, Year B

Changing the Narrative

John 8:31 – 36

Reformation Sunday

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

31Jesus 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: Telling Stories

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Lies

We human beings are captive to lies these days: Just read the news for five minutes and there's no escaping deceit. "It was an interrogation gone wrong." "The cardinal knew nothing about the priest's impropriety when he moved him to a new parish." Fake news is touted as real news, and the truth is nowhere to be found. So many words and so little truth. We are anything but free.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Telling Ourselves Stories

The lies that are imposed on us aren't the only ones that bind

us though. The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves serve a purpose, too. They help us to maintain the illusion that we are victims of circumstance; standers-by in a world that is simply happening to us. We are Christians—how could anybody say that we are racist, sexist, partial to the wealthy, in it for ourselves, or profiteering?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The End

We are slaves to others' and our own lies. And slaves don't get to determine their own fate. They are subject to a master. And our Master cannot be happy with our performance. We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Not only are we "homeless" (v. 35), but our servitude means we have a terminal sentence.

PROGNOSIS: Changing the Narrative

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): A New Beginning

But what if Someone else is actually responsible for the narrative about us? What if the Master is also the One who chooses to take the form of a slave and humble himself (on the cross) in our stead? What if that One is the Son who has come to set us free? Then we are free indeed. Then we have a place in the household. And that place is permanent.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Telling Ourselves the Story



That kind of news—about a permanent place in God's household—can

sound too good to be true—like fake news even. After all the world is full of stories about human worth (or the lack of human worth) that are hard to shake from our consciences. No wonder Jesus says we need to “continue in [his] word.” In a world that would reduce us to nothing if we lack the proper connections, we need to hear Christ’s assurance and call—his narrative about us—again and again.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Truth

And that narrative, Christ’s truth that sets us free, makes it possible for us to see beyond the stories that the world and we ourselves tell. Indeed, Christ sets us free not only from those lies, but frees us for the sake of a world that is captive to deceit and self-deceit. No doubt that’s why Luther said, “A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (The Freedom of a Christian).