

The Lutheran Church.

Text: John 8:31-32

Suggested Hymns:
195, 191, 186, 840, 183

- 1) Its Loyal Adherence To God's Word
- 2) Its Clear Understanding And Profession Of
The Truth Of Salvation
- 3) Its Wonderful Freedom

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 8:31–32, ³¹ *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* ³² *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What do we mean by “*Lutheran Church*”? The Church so called did not choose this name. Rather it was thrust upon it by its enemies as a term of contempt. But the name which was intended to deter people from joining it has become one of dignity and attraction.

The Lutheran Church is the Church of the Reformation, or the Church which holds and defends the Bible truths which Luther again taught when he purified Christendom from man-made additions and doctrines.

No Church can truly call itself Lutheran unless it stands for that for which Luther stood — salvation by grace alone, revealed in Scripture alone, accepted by faith alone.

And again, all true believers who maintain these principles are Lutheran in spirit, even though they outwardly do not belong to the Lutheran Church.

The Lutheran Church is not a sect, but the Apostolic Church, restored to its pristine purity in faith and life. Its creed is ecumenical. It accepts honestly and professedly the ancient creeds. It excludes and rejects all ancient and modern errors.

The Lutheran Church is rightly exclusive and anti-unionistic.¹ It is not the *una sancta*,— for there are true members of the holy Christian Church also

outside the Lutheran Church, but it is the orthodox Church on earth, the true visible Church of Christ on earth.

It challenges all people to examine its teachings and to disprove its doctrines; but if these doctrines cannot be proved wrong, indeed, because they agree with Scripture, the Lutheran Church upholds the proud claim that it is the Church of the Bible, the Gospel voice.

Today is Reformation Sunday and all these facts we must constantly bear in mind.

However, there are so-called Lutheran churches which do not deserve this title of dignity. Within Lutheran denominations the demand is made that the Lutheran Church must become more liberal, more sectarian, and more unionistic.

On the other hand, the Papacy, the deep-seated foe of true Lutheranism wants everybody under her umbrella and produces wordy documents such as the joint declaration which can be interpreted to suit anyone's position.

The growth of the true Lutheran Church is not phenomenal. Although it preaches the Gospel in its full truth and purity, its membership remains comparatively small.

So there are many things at which even Lutherans are sometimes offended. Should we, however, be offended? Luther said that all who are offended in him and his doctrine, are offended in Christ and His Gospel.

We must not be offended at the Lutheran Church, but confess and defend its vital principles and its holy doctrines with ever greater fervour and zeal. On this Reformation Sunday let us therefore examine this matter more closely. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Lutheran Church. Its Loyal Adherence To God's Word

The words of our text were addressed by Christ to "*those Jews who believed Him,*" who had definitely accepted Him as the "*Light of the world,*" and who were earnest and sincere in their profession of Him.

They professed Christ in opposition to the Pharisees, who hardened themselves against His Gospel.² The number of those who believed in Jesus

were not small but “*many*.”³ However, they needed strengthening of their faith, and confirmation of their resolve to follow Christ.⁴

What did Jesus demand of them? What rule of discipleship did He lay down for them? His words are simple: *If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* Discipleship of Christ does not consist in outward things. Not the outward following of Jesus, not the calling of oneself by His name, makes a person a disciple of Christ.

True discipleship is inward and spiritual. It presupposes true faith in, and abiding loyalty to, God’s Word. The disciple must learn the lessons the heavenly Teacher has taught us in His Word and cling and conform to them. In His school the rule is fixed and the doctrine established for all times. Disciples must therefore accept unwaveringly this rule and doctrine.

When speaking of this, Christ had in mind not only the divine Law. He wished to be accepted and adored not merely as an “ideal” or as an “example,” but as the “*Light of the world,*” and as the “*Son of Man lifted up.*” He had in mind pre-eminently the Gospel of His atoning suffering and death.⁵

In that Gospel, which is foolishness and an offence to the world,⁶ His disciples must abide, continue, and dwell. That must be the foundation of their faith and hope, the holiest truth in which all their religious thoughts centre. Jesus demanded a Church that is abidingly loyal to His Word, His precious Gospel.

“*My Word*”⁷ is the whole Bible; for the Spirit of Christ spoke by the prophets and the apostles.⁸ Discipleship of Christ means faithful adherence to the Bible and to nothing but the Bible. Christ’s Church is the Bible “Church.”

The Lutheran Church is a Church of true discipleship. It continues in Christ’s Word in doctrine and practise. It maintains as its formal principle (i.e. authoritative source) the *sola Scriptura, Scripture alone.* It stands four-square on the holy Bible. Whatever the Bible teaches the Lutheran Church teaches; whatever the Bible rejects the Lutheran Church rejects.

It acknowledges no spurious sources of faith, no traditions, no decretals of Popes, no opinions of reason, no hypotheses of science falsely so called, no speculations of enlightened reason, — nothing at all outside the Bible.

Our Small Catechism proves this through the Six Chief parts of Christian Doctrine. The Ten Commandments, The Apostles' Creed, The Lord's Prayer, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, The Sacrament of Holy Communion, The Office of the Keys and Confession. They all show how the Lutheran Church loyally adheres to God's Word.

The church of Rome and the reformed churches use human reason as their ultimate guide and refuse to continue in Christ's Word alone. In their denominations there are children of God, but these believing Christians really do not belong to these erring churches. They hold membership in them only outwardly.

However, the Lutheran Church continues in Christ's Word also in practise. Christ in His Word demands a definite practise in conformity to it. Faith and practise must go hand in hand. The Word professed must be applied to life. We can see this in its position on the calling of ministers, unionism, closed Communion, etc.

Such, then, is the Lutheran Church, a Church of true discipleship of Christ, adhering to Christ's Word with sincere loyalty. In this it follows the ancient Apostolic Church, the members of which rather suffered martyrdom than deny Christ.⁹

We must not be ashamed of our dear old Lutheran Church. If we are ashamed of its doctrines and the firm stand it takes in matters of doctrine and practise, we are ashamed of Christ.

Let us praise God that by grace He has made us members of this Church, and let us do all we can to uphold its dignity and truth, which the world needs so much today. Pharisees and Sadducees still oppose Christ; we must be loyal to Him.

2. The Lutheran Church.

Its Clear Understanding And Profession Of The Truth Of Salvation

The Lutheran Church professes as its authoritative source (formal principle) that every article of faith must be based upon an explicit word of God, and as its material principle (i.e. central doctrine) it professes that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

We read in Ephesians 2:8–9, ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Let us now study its clear understanding and profession of the truth of salvation.

The spirit of the agnostic pervades all rationalistic and modernistic churches today. They claim that the truth cannot be known. With Pilate they say: *“What is truth?”* But Christ says in our text, *“And you shall know the truth.”* What did Jesus mean by *“the truth”*!

Jesus did not speak of that truth which lies within the domain of earthly things. That truth we know by reason, although on account of original sin, which has corrupted also our intellectual powers, this truth is not readily perceived as we can see from some of modern science (e.g. the false theory of evolution); the confusion of politics; modern ethics, etc.

Even the truth of the Moral Law man by nature may somewhat perceive.¹⁰ However, man does not by nature know, and cannot know, spiritual truth,¹¹ the truth regarding salvation, of which Christ speaks in our text.¹² With respect to this truth all people by nature walk in darkness and therefore do not possess *“the light of life.”*

But how different it is when people believe in Christ and continue in His Word! Then they know the truth, know it sufficiently, and know it to their salvation. How well St. Peter knew this truth!¹³ How well St. Paul knew it!¹⁴ as we read in Romans 3:28, ²⁸ *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*

Just so all believers know the truth of salvation. All who do not know the truth are not Christians. The true Christian says: *“I know whom I have believed.”*¹⁵ Every true believer knows and professes the same truth.

This teaching, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, includes the whole truth of salvation. It is the central teaching of the Lutheran Church. How clearly and convincingly it knows and professes this divine truth!

In this truth centre the second and third articles of our Christian faith. Luther has written explanations of these articles, and how precious they are! In

these articles Luther professes the doctrines of Christ's person and work and of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Then he shows how the truth of salvation is set forth in the chief parts of the Sacraments and the Office of the Keys and Confession. The Lutheran Church teaches the divine Law in all its severity in order that the Gospel may be preached in all its sweetness. We have seen this from the recent articles on Law and Gospel written by C.F.W. Walther. The Lutheran Church knows the truth regarding salvation and professes it unafraid of any foes of the Gospel.

Should we not praise God for having led us most graciously into a Church which knows the truth? Salvation is our uppermost concern, as we read in Matthew 16:26, ²⁶ *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* Let us value the truth of salvation, the *sola gratia*, grace alone, with all that it implies.

3. The Lutheran Church. Its Wonderful Freedom

Of those who continue in His Word, Christ also says, “*and the truth shall make you free.*” It shall liberate you, free you.

What did Christ mean by this? He referred to Isaiah 61:1-3, ¹ “*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,*

³ *To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.*”

In preaching good tidings to the meek, He proclaims “*liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*” Christ here does not mean political or social and economic freedom, but freedom from our spiritual foes.

Freedom from the guilt of sin;¹⁶ freedom from hell;¹⁷ freedom from the accusations of conscience;¹⁸ freedom from the dominion of wickedness;¹⁹ freedom from the erroneous opinions of men;²⁰ freedom from ceremonies and external forms;²¹ freedom from Satan;²² freedom from man-made rules;²³ freedom from man-conceived worship;²⁴ freedom from the love of this world;²⁵ freedom from the demand of the Law that we must fulfil before we may enter life eternal.²⁶

What glorious freedom! Justification frees us from the guilt of sin; and *“where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”*

Sanctification frees us more and more from corruption.²⁷ We Christians are free from the yoke of the Ceremonial Law and the grievous burdens of human traditions. We are free from spiritual bondage. We serve God, freely, and willingly;²⁸ we are free to use the privileges of the sons of God; free citizens of the free Jerusalem, which is above.²⁹

We are free from all prejudices, mistakes, and false notions of men that enslave and entangle the soul; free from the dominion of lust and passion;³⁰ free to look at the glory of the Lord and to be changed into the same image of glory.³¹

Enemies of Christianity boast of their free thinking and their free thought; but they are in the worst kind of servitude, the servitude of their reprobate minds, of their Satan-controlled hearts.

True free thinking is Christian thinking, Gospel thinking. The only free thought there is, is found in those whom the Gospel has made free. All thoughts that are brought into obedience to Christ are free and glorious.

How wonderful the freedom is of our own dear Lutheran Church! How beautifully it proclaims the freedom of souls through the Gospel! How gloriously free it is from the traditions of men and the bondage of ceremonial laws!

The Gospel is the proclamation of spiritual liberty; and oh, how clearly, how forcefully, the Lutheran Church proclaims this Gospel with all its manifold freedom!

Gospel freedom made the Reformation and it is still the dynamic of our Lutheran Church. What slavery exists in the Roman and Reformed churches. Our Lutheran Church is the true company of God's kings and priests.

And what shall we say in conclusion? Continue in Christ's Word. Only then are you His disciples indeed. Only then can you know the truth. Only then you will be free from all spiritual bondage, and be children of God, and heirs of eternal salvation. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Rom. 16:17; 2 John 10

² John 8:12

³ John 8:30

⁴ John 8:12, 28

⁵ John 8:28

⁶ 1 Cor. 1:23

⁷ John 8:31

⁸ 1 Pet. 1:10—12

⁹ Matt. 10:31-32

¹⁰ Rom. 1: 19-20, 32

¹¹ 1 Cor. 2:14

¹² John 8:12, 28

¹³ Acts 2; 1 Pet. 1:1—9

¹⁴ Rom. 3:20—28

¹⁵ 2 Tim. 1:12

¹⁶ Col. 1:14

¹⁷ Col. 1:13

¹⁸ Col. 1:20

¹⁹ Col. 1:21

²⁰ Col. 2:8

²¹ Col. 2:14

²² Col. 2:15

²³ Col. 2:16

²⁴ Col. 2:18, 20, 21—23

²⁵ Col. 3:1—3

²⁶ Rom. 3:28

²⁷ Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24

²⁸ Psa. 110:3

²⁹ Gal. 4:26

³⁰ 2 Cor. 3:17

³¹ 2 Cor. 3:18