

SERMON DELIVERED AT THE SUNDAY CONVENTION SERVICE

by

The Rev. Robert J. Lietz ● Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church ● Oak Park, Illinois

Text: John 8:31-32

My dear friends, let us not forget the words of our Savior: “*Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it [believe it, treasure it, and follow it]*” (Luke 11:28).

We frequently find and come across reminders and warnings on the pages of Holy Scripture. Pastors are reminded in II Timothy 4 to “*preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (v. 2). In Hebrews 3, Christians, called “*holy brethren*” (v. 1), are reminded and warned when they are told: “*Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation and said: They do always err in their heart, and they have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath: They shall not enter into My rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in **any of you** an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest **any of you** be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ if we **hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end***” (vv. 7-14). In Revelation 2, we are given this reminder: “*Be thou faithful unto death*” (v. 10d). First Corinthians 10 sets before us this warning: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (v. 12). It is clear that our God reminds us to stick with Him and not arrogantly to turn away from Him. This morning’s sermon text, John 8:31-32, reminds us to stick with our Savior and His authoritative Word. We will therefore have, on the basis of these two verses, as the theme and parts for this sermon:

Sticking with the Authoritative Word of Jesus

- I. Assures us that we are Jesus’ true disciples;
- II. Assures us of the truth; and
- III. Assures us of freedom.

Jesus had been teaching the people His Word and will (John 8:2, 12, etc.). His enemies, the Pharisees, said to Him: “*Thou bearest record of Thyself; Thy record is not true*” (v. 13). Despite this opposition, the verse right before our sermon text conveys to us these facts: “*As He spake these words, many believed on Him*” (v. 30). “*Then [in our text] said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him: ‘If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.’*”

No one is a disciple of Jesus or a believer in Jesus when they are born into this world. King David confessed these words of truth: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5). When we and all other babies were born into this world, we were **physically** alive, but **spiritually** “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1b); at our birth, we were “*the children of wrath*” (v. 3b); God was angry with us on account of our inherited sin; we were not right before God as Romans 3 teaches us when it conveys to us this message: “*There is none righteous, no, not one*” (v. 10).

Jesus told Nicodemus: “*Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). The Apostle Peter gave instruction concerning this second birth when he wrote down these words: “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. ...And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you*” (I Peter 1:23, 25b). Only the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ in particular, produces the second birth, gives spiritual and eternal life to souls which, at their conception and birth, were spiritually “*dead*” (Ephesians 2:1b). This is totally God’s work, without any input or cooperation from those who are spiritually dead at their conception and birth. In I Peter 2, the believers in Jesus are told: “*Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [special] people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy*” (vv. 9-10). Anyone who is a disciple and a believer in Jesus is such solely and only because of the undeserved goodness and mercy of God in Christ Jesus working through the living Gospel, which “*is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth*” (Romans 1:16b), for “*by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is an unchanging fact that the **creating** of faith in Jesus in the souls of those who “*were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1b) is possible only through the means of the Word of the Gospel, the Gospel of the “*good tidings of great joy*” (Luke 2:10) in Christ Jesus, but it is also an unchanging fact that the **preserving and the continuing** of that saving faith in Christ is possible only through the means of that same Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus, that authoritative, living, and powerful message that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*” (I Timothy 1:15) through His perfect, substitutionary obedience of God’s Law once for all (Romans 5:19b), and through His perfect, substitutionary sacrifice of His very own, holy, sinless body “*once for all*” (Hebrews 10:10).

When the disciples of Jesus, the believers in Jesus continue to stick with the Word of God, the Word of the Gospel, this is proof and evidence that they are not hypocrites or unbelievers, but dear followers of Jesus, the children of God. Jesus, in our text, leaves no doubt when He says: “*If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed*” (v. 31), that is, this sticking with God’s Word is a real, certain, true fruit of faith in the Savior. Jesus Himself declared in John 10: “*My sheep hear My voice [My Word], and I know them and they follow Me*” (v. 27).

Faith in Jesus can and will be destroyed when the authoritative, living, and powerful Word of God is persistently, willfully opposed and resisted after being faithfully taught the Word of God. Later on in John 8, Jesus said to those who had believed in Him for only a short time: “*He that is of God heareth God’s words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God*” (v. 47). Oh my! These Jews who were brought to believe in Jesus destroyed that new faith in Jesus by their rejection of His words. The Savior said to them: “*Ye seek to kill Me because My Word hath no place in you*” (v. 37b). This 8th chapter of John’s Gospel is proof enough that the false teaching, “*Once in faith, always in faith,*” is a blatant and outrageous lie.

Let us repent of all the times when we have not stuck with the authoritative, living Word of Jesus in our lives as we should have, and cling for comfort to the certain assurance that “*the blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son, cleanseth us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). Then, out of gratitude for this cleansing from our sins, let us willingly bow more and more to the words of Jesus: “*If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.*”

Sticking with the authoritative Word of Jesus not only assures us of being true disciples of Jesus, but this authoritative Word of Jesus assures us of the truth.

II.

In our text, Jesus says: *“If ye continue in My Word, ...ye shall know the truth”* (v. 32a). This is a sure, reassuring, certain, and unchanging promise from our Savior; this is His work through His Word for us, for our knowledge of the truth. When we stick with, remain with, and persevere in the Word of Jesus, this Word of God will bring us to know and to have the truth. Jesus told His heavenly Father: *“Thy Word is truth”* (John 17:17). Jesus, the Son of God, *“cannot lie”* (Titus 1:2). When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus: *“Art Thou a King then?”* (John 18:37a), Jesus gave this answer: *“Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice”* (v. 37b).

This truth most certainly includes the truth of God’s Law, which demands perfect love toward God – *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”* (Matthew 22:37). The truth of the Law of God also demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39); the truth of the Law of God demands of us: *“Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy”* (Leviticus 19:2); the truth of the Law of God, furthermore, demands of us: *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding”* (Proverbs 3:5). The truth of the Ten Commandments makes these demands of us: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Thou shalt sanctify the holy day. Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s”* (Exodus 20:3, 7a; Ephesians 6:2-3; Exodus 20:12-17). By the truth of God’s Law *“is the knowledge of sin”* (Romans 3:20b).

But the truth from Jesus’ Word is above all and most importantly the truth of the Gospel that *“when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”* (Galatians 4:4-5). The truth of the Gospel gives us the certainty that *“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. ...For He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (II Corinthians 5:19 and 21). Isaiah 53 gives us the priceless truth that *“the Lord hath laid on Him [Christ Jesus] the iniquity of us all”* (v. 6b). Oh, let us continue to cling, by faith, to the truth of the Gospel for us in Hebrews 10, *“Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”* (v. 17), and the truth of the Law and the Gospel in Romans 3: *“There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [a payment, a ransom] through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say at this time, His righteousness, that He might be just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law”* (vv. 22b-28).

Anything which is different from or contrary to the Law of God and the Gospel of Christ is to be rejected and hated as an enemy of the truth of the Word of God. Psalm 119 is very forthright when it says to us: *“Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”* (vv. 104-105).

Sticking with the authoritative Word of Jesus not only assures us of being Jesus’ true disciples; it not only assures us of the truth, but it also assures us of freedom.

III.

In our text, Jesus declared: *“If ye continue in My Word, ...the truth shall make you free”* (v. 32b). Free from what? 1) The truth of the Gospel alone gives us freedom from the curse and condemnation of God’s Law. We are assured of this fact in Galatians 3, verse 13: *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.”* In John 3 we are given this certainty: *“God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him [on Christ Jesus] is not condemned”* (vv. 17-18a). 2) The truth of the Gospel alone gives us freedom from the fear of death and the grave. This is confirmed to us in I Corinthians 15, verses 55-57: *“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law, but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* 3) The truth of the Gospel alone us gives us freedom from the deceit of error and false doctrine. Psalm 119 provides this assurance to the child of God: *“Through Thy precepts [which surely include the message of the Gospel] I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way”* (v. 104).

The new believers to whom Jesus said, *“The truth shall make you free,”* took exception to and were offended by Jesus’ words to them. They said to Him: *“We be Abraham’s seed and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free”* (v. 33)? Jesus said to them: *“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a Man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham”* (vv. 39-40). Oh, how we have to be on guard against being offended by the Word of God, especially the Law of God, when its truth disagrees with our opinions, our ideas, our thoughts, and our experiences. Let us, through the truth and the promises of the Gospel, always say “Yes” to the truths of God’s Word and “No” to anything contrary to or different from those truths of the Holy Scriptures.

Furthermore, let us, in our own individual lives, in our congregations, and in our Conference, remember and treasure the words of our sermon text, ever motivated by the perfect, substitutionary, finished, and free obedience, suffering, and death of our one and only priceless Savior, *“who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar [special] people, zealous of good works”* (Titus 2:14). Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!