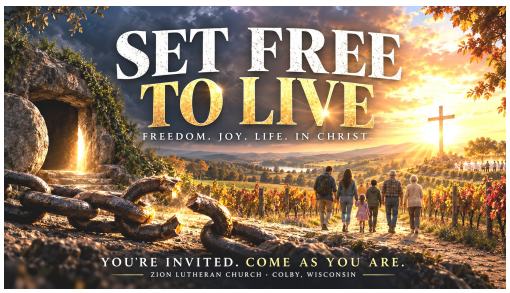
Sermon for
Reformation Sunday



Date: October 25, 2026
Location: Zion – Colby, WI
Christ – Abbotsford, WI
St. Paul – Green Grove, WI



First Reading: Revelation 14:6–7
Epistle Reading: Romans 3:19–28
Gospel Reading: John 8:31–36

Sermon Series: Set Free to Live
Sermon Title: The Freedom of a Christian
Sermon Text: John 8:31–36

Hymns:

Opening: 656 – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God (v.1,3)
Sermon: 555 – Salvation unto Us Has Come (v.1,6,7)
Offering: 729 – I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus (v.1,4,5,6)
Closing: 655 – Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

Distribution:

LSB 556 – Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice
LSB 578 – Thy Strong Word
LSB 761 – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me
LSB 438 – A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth



Text: John 8:31–36

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the Gospel reading today we heard these words:

> They replied to Jesus, "We are Abraham's descendants, and we have never been anyone's slaves. So how can you say that we will be set free?"[1]

It was Independence Day, but there were no fireworks, sparklers, parades, or floats. There was no Statue of Liberty. There were no hot dogs, no apple pies, and no Chevrolet. On this day there weren't even any patriotic songs like the Star Spangled Banner. It was Independence Day, but it wasn't even the Fourth of July. It also wasn't 1776. It was, in fact, October 31st. This Independence Day was 259 years earlier.

A German monk, of the Augustinian Order, fired the "shot heard 'round the world." For years he had known only slavery, captivity; a personal prison of guilt for sin. This monk felt an obligation to spend weeks without food, without speaking, without even seeing the light of day. He would sometimes use a whip and whip himself until he was unconscious.



Then, one day, taking hammer in hand, on Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the Wittenberg Castle Church door. In this single act Luther began the journey toward freedom.

This declaration of independence was driven by the words of Jesus:

"...the truth will set you free.[2]"

The Temple Authority, of Jesus' day, answered this declaration of independence by saying:

> "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.[3]"



Not when they were in Egypt?[4] Not when the Philistines invaded their land and regulated even the way axes and farm tools were sharpened?[5] Not when the Assyrians carried off the people of the Northern Kingdom?[6] Not when the Babylonians did the same to those in the Southern Kingdom?[7] Not when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple with an image of Zeus?[8] Not when Pompey and his legions marched into Jerusalem to claim it for Rome?[9] "We have never been slaves of anyone"? That is just a flat out denial of the truth.

Those delusions are not unique to those fine folks who talked with Jesus that day. You've seen the same prisoners. You've seen this thing in people who have problems with gambling,

1 John 8:33
2 John 8:32
3 John 8:33
4 Exodus 1:8-14
5 1 Samuel 13:17-22
6 1 Kings 12
7 Jeremiah 27
8 http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/greece/2-antiochus-iv-bust-bb.html
9 http://www.ifcj.org/site/PageNavigator/sfi_about_history_roman

drugs, gossip and lying all caught in this same denial, this same dream, this same illusion. The truth is none of us can say, "we have never been slaves of anyone." Jesus hammers home this hard reality when He says:

"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.[10]"

That's us. Trapped in sin, stuck in habits we cannot stop, and sinking into a bondage we cannot break. Worse yet, just like the Jews of Jesus' day, we often live in the denial of, "we have never been slaves of anyone," but sin makes everyone a slave; everyone is powerless to break free.



Some of you are in the cage of addictive behavior like abuse, anger, gossip, or sarcasm. Others are chained to a grudge that won't be satisfied until there is revenge. Still others are fighting an inner battle with a skeleton in your closet that is rattling louder and louder. Whatever your particular slavery to sin might be, it has left you in a cage of despair, darkness, and even death. Your heart's cry has become, "Let me out!"

Make no mistake. The devil wants to lock you up and throw away the key. If it is the truth that frees you, then it is the liar that keeps you captured and kills. In the same chapter where we read our Gospel reading today, Jesus describes Satan and those who have turned their hearts over to him:

> You come from your father, the devil, and you desire to do what your father wants you to do. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has never been truthful. He doesn't know what the truth is. Whenever he tells a lie, he's doing what comes naturally to him. He's a liar and the father of lies.[11]

Day after day we scream hopelessly, "Let me out!" While the father-of-lies keeps whispering, "I've got you. There is no way out. Throw in the towel. Give in, give out, and give up."

Martin Luther knew that voice very well. He writes in that great Reformation hymn:

The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe.
With craft and dreadful might
he arms himself to fight;
On earth he has no equal.[12]

When we believe Satan's lies we find ourselves going deeper, farther, and longer into that dark night, until we are bound, tied, and fettered in chains, often of our own making.

Know this: Jesus hears your cry, "Let me out!" He responds with this promise: "…the Truth will set you free.[13]" Our own striving, planning, and plotting do not achieve freedom from these

10 John 8:34
11 John 8:44
12 LSB 657:2
13 John 8:32

things, try as we might to go it alone. Our best efforts and imagination are pointless and profitless. It is the truth that sets us free, not fantasy.



St. John's Gospel is full of fireworks as it celebrates this life-changing news, "Jesus Christ is the world's only liberating Truth." Listen to what John says about our only true Savior:

> The Word became human and lived among us. We saw His glory. It was the glory that the Father shares with His only Son, a glory full of kindness and truth.[14]

> Laws were given through Moses, but kindness and truth came into existence through Jesus Christ.[15]

Listen to what Jesus says:

> I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me.[16]

Jesus is the Truth that sets us free. To Nicodemus, caged in the hopeless laws of Pharisaical legalism, He said:

> God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.[17]

To the woman at Jacob's well, bound to one broken relationship after another, He said:

> The water I will give them will become in them a spring that gushes up to eternal life.[18]

To the man born in the prison of blindness He said:

> Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam.[19]

To Mary and Martha, locked in grief over the death of their brother Lazarus, He said:

> I am the Resurrection and the Life.[20]

To Peter, who had publicly, openly, and with curses, denied knowing Him three times, Jesus said:

> Take care of My sheep.[21]

Jesus brings freedom, but freedom has a price.

14 John 1:14
15 John 1:17
16 John 14:6
17 John 3:17
18 John 4:14
19 John 9:7
20 John 11:25
21 John 21:17

The 56 signers of the Deceleration of Independence pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Most died poor broke. They understood that freedom could be costly. Freedom has a high price.

On the night before His death, Jesus was bound and taken to Annas the high priest. He was slapped, spit on, and sent to Caiaphas. Then blindfolded, He was struck in the face with fists and beaten by guards. The next morning He was taken to Pilate, who passed Him off to Herod. Herod mockingly dressed Him in a purple robe.

Then back before Pilate, He was crowned with thorns, stripped and whipped mercilessly. Struck and spit on again, He walked the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows. Finally, He was stretched out on two posts, and three iron spikes were hammered into His flesh. His friends had run away. His possessions had been gambled away. His strength was ebbing away. Even His Father had turned away.



All He had left were these three words: “It is finished.” With those words He did not succumb to slavery. With those words our slavery was broken. The sacrifice was successful. Death was defeated. Paradise restored. “It is finished!” A cry of defeat? By no means! This is the Savior’s victory cry! Let freedom ring!

This is the honest-to-God truth. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means you are liberated from the father-of-lies, and your prison doors are swung wide open. Martin Luther enjoyed hearing this same truth and wrote these words:

> I felt as if I were entirely born again, and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung wide open.



This same freeing power sets us free from the seduction to sin, from the pain of our past, from fretting about our future. No one can take this freedom away; no law can stop it, and no power on Earth or in Hell can destroy it. Yet still there is more freedom to come!

As you grow in your walk with Jesus, His freeing power unlocks more and more prison doors. Until, finally, every believer will experience ultimate freedom in the resurrection of the dead, and in the life of the world to come! The day of victory we will celebrate next week: All Saints’ Day.

This message rediscovered by Luther, and celebrated on this Reformation Sunday, is a loud and clear message:

> If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!

Free in every way! This is your Independence Day! This is the heritage that was passed on to you. 150 years ago people scrimped and saved every and any penny. As the Great Depression loomed and futures fell apart, a congregation built this very structure in which you now sit. Zion

has been, and remains, that beacon of freedom in Colby. This is the heritage are passing on to the next generation and the generations to come.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

