

As American Christians who are Lutheran, there are two times we celebrate our freedom. There's the Fourth of July. We celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. There's the Reformation. We celebrate the nailing of the 95 Theses in Wittenberg.

The Declaration of Independence and the 95 Theses have something else in common besides celebrating freedoms. They also celebrate the truth. The truth about what we want our nation to be – with the Declaration of Independence. The truth about what God's Word needs to be – with the 95 Theses.

Truth today seems to be an ever-changing word. It's so convenient that everyone has their own version of the truth. That's what makes the truth of God's Word so critical. Our salvation depends on it.

The truth of God's Word is under attack. Come to think of it, the truth of God's Word has always been under attack. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world and had one command: *"Don't eat from one tree."* And sure enough, the father of lies, an enemy of the truth, came along and asked: *"Did God really say you shouldn't eat the fruit that looks good, tastes even better and will make you like God?"*

So, it shouldn't surprise us that the truth of God's Word came under attack at Martin Luther's time. False teachings like: purgatory – a third destination for the soul; you're saved by works in addition to your faith; the traditions of the church are at the same level as God's Word. And, those same Bible truths continue to be under attack today. We live in a society that no longer believes in any absolute truth. Truth changes from person to person and from situation to situation.

That's why today's celebration is so necessary. Satan attacks the truth and the world disagrees with the truth. We need to be reassured in the absolute truth of God's Word, because it only this truth **"That Will Set You Free!"**

All of God's Word can be broken down into two basic truths - the Law and the Gospel. The truth of the Law is that when the Lord tells us in his Word we sin, we are sinners. And truth of the Gospel is that when the Lord tells us in his Word that he forgives us, we are forgiven.

Is it possible that we would disagree with these truths, or not want to listen to them? Sure. We may feel we're handling things so well we don't see a need for Jesus. If that's true, then things are critical. We're unaware of the dangerous condition of our soul.

That's the situation Jesus ran into in today's lesson. As Jesus brought the truth of God's Word – Law and Gospel – to God's people, they didn't want to hear about their slavery to sin and their forgiveness in Jesus. We hear their defiant protest: **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"**

Their words indicate that they either they didn't know what slavery was, or they were in denial. Either way, history states: their forefathers had been carted off as slaves to both Assyria and Babylon. Their forefathers had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. When this conversation in our lesson was taking place, the Jews had been under Roman control for a couple of centuries.

Their connection to Abraham was their guarantee, in the same way an indulgence was a guarantee during the days of Martin Luther. The final straw behind Luther's reform of the church was the sale of indulgences. For a fee, German peasants could purchase a piece of paper guaranteeing complete protection against sin. The funds raised covered the construction costs for St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. There was a definite need to return to the truth of God's Word and Luther addressed by preaching and teaching Law and Gospel.

Just as there was a need for the truth to be preached and taught then, so there is that same

need today. Many Jews may still pride themselves in their ties to Abraham in the same many Christians still pride themselves in their ties to a congregation, or the family ties within a congregation.

It's still happening - people still miss the truth about sin. There's this false notion that nothing's wrong with me, or anything I do. Deny, deny, deny. The idea of admitting I'm wrong is a weakness.

And that leaves people living a lie and living with the guilt of that lie. They're dreading the day they'll be discovered for who they really are.

While we try to cover up our lies and sins. Jesus uncovers the truth of who we really are. We are sinners who disobey God. We regularly make others feel bad with our words. Our actions are often unkind and unloving. Our thoughts - we'd never want anyone to know the hateful and jealous things going on inside our hearts and heads.

Admit the truth. Don't cover up your lies and sins, confess them. Admitting we're sinful is only half of the truth of God's Word.

There's another half. When sin is confessed, forgiveness is offered. That's the gift that Jesus gives in the closing verses of our lesson: **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed** - free as in forgiven.

The one who sins is all tied up in sin and its guilt. That's the Law. In Jesus, we find the good news message of the Gospel. Jesus forgives. He frees us from our slavery to sin.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, had no sin of his own. That's why his life could be substituted for ours in God's sight.

Jesus, the almighty Son of God, carried the weight of the world's sins on his back to the cross. That's why his death could be substituted for ours in God's sight.

Trusting in Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, now sets us free – free to confess our sins. Free to stand forgiven before God. Free to be what God created us to be – handcrafted to serve each other.

Of all the countries in the world, we Americans really pride ourselves in our freedoms. But the truth is, even as Americans we aren't free. We allow our schedules and our bank accounts and our possessions to rule our lives. We consider bigger and better our goals. We spend so much time worrying about and so much energy hanging on to our lifestyles.

Things haven't changed much over the years. That's why Paul encourages Christians, don't become slaves again: **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."** We live free by holding on to the truth of God's forgiveness.

- When we sin, we ask for and receive forgiveness instead of being weighed down by guilt and shame.
- When we run into, or back into difficult times, we find strength in God's ever-present help.
- Instead of being selfish and self-centered, we live to see God and others first.

Today is a celebration of our freedom – every day is. One of the best expressions of our freedom as Christians is in the last verse of the: *"Battle Hymn of the Republic,"* that patriotic song where we sing:

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea.

With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.

As he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free.

While God is marching on.

May we live to make men and women and children free - with the truth about God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, about sin and forgiveness through our Savior Jesus Christ.