

# *Sermon: Reformation Sunday*

The Rev. Mike Wernick

October 25, 2015

Year B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

America is the land of the free... and the home of the brave... but we are all slaves... we don't live our lives wearing shackles and chains... but we are all slaves... we can travel almost anywhere we want and whenever we want... but we're slaves nonetheless...

We're slaves when we react instead of act... we're slaves when we are either not aware of the multi-generational dysfunction which helped form us as children... or when we're in denial about it... when we continue to buy into and support the systems which oppress... demean... and diminish any of God's children... we're slaves when we reject the fullness that God has in store for all of us... because we want to control... someone I know used to say... that as long as she kept silent... that worked out for everyone else but her... then fewer people had to be considerate in new ways... then fewer people had to change...

Professor Ginger Barfield... from the Lutheran seminary in S.C... wrote: The Jews seize onto the wrong concept... the wrong truth about freedom... they are descendants of Abraham and are free... the exact phrasing here is emphatic... and we might classify it as bad grammar: "We have never by no means ever been slaves to no one." In the context of these chapters... this assertion of never having been enslaved is ludicrous.... the very feast they're observing is that of God's graceful deliverance of them in the wilderness as they made their way from Egyptian slavery to the promised land...

The supreme misunderstanding of identities and place... she wrote... is the core misunderstanding of Jesus and his mission... Jesus is reforming the thinking of the Jews of his day... and they simply do not seem to comprehend... either there is some deep denial... and perhaps some hubris going on... or Jesus is adding some hyperbole

to make the point... that even though God delivered them from Pharaoh... they are still slaves...

Some of you may remember that I expressed part of my conversion experience... as the realization that I didn't need to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders... that it wasn't all up to me... that God in Christ already made all things right... even when they didn't seem right... or may not have gone as well as possible on the surface...

That didn't mean though... that my work was over... that there was no more healing that could be done... no more learning... no more setting things right... the work of being in better relationship was not over... only the work of salvation was complete...

But there are many people... I think... who don't carry that weight... who won't carry that weight... who never even considered it... but many of them reach that point... arrive at that place... more out of cynicism than out of surrender... more out of individualistic isolation than out of any sense of community... more out of rigid boundaries than out of any sense of boundlessness... and for me... it was more out of a sense of some integration with Mystery... and the love of God in Christ... for me... it was more out of a sense of connection...

And so I agree with Professor Barfield... that those to whom Jesus was speaking... weren't free... because they... like some of us... remained constrained by the social... cultural... and religious boundaries imposed on them... which themselves imposed consequences for non-compliance... now I'm not saying we don't need boundaries... I'm not saying we ought to live in a world where anything goes... though it certainly seems like that sometimes... I'm not saying we don't need laws that impose consequences when needed... because some people don't respect each other's dignity... I'm not arguing for anarchy...

But maybe I am arguing for a kind of spiritual anarchy... the kind of spiritual anarchy that turns us into celestial whistle-blowers... when the environment is being polluted... or the earth is being pillaged... when the rich get richer while the poor get poorer... when we realize that someone's feelings are hurt and no healing balm is offered because it's too messy... or when Martin Luther challenged the excesses and abuse of the church... when historians established a point-in-time on the continuum of reformation... but that event... the energy of that spiritual anarchy... created divisions that I do not believe were part of God's intent...

A few of you know that I attend a weekly ecumenical clergy bible-study group... there are about sixteen clergy who meet regularly... Episcopalians... Roman Catholics... RCA ministers... and a Presbyterian... and the group has been meeting for more than twenty years... but this past Wednesday... there was some evidence that some of these divisions are healing... we were joined by Roman Catholic Bishop David Walkowiak... Episcopal Bishop Wayne Houghland... and Lutheran Bishop Craig Satterlee... it was a remarkable convergence... they joined us so they could meet each other... they joined us as we discussed the regular Sunday lectionary... though only Bishop Craig and I were preaching on Reformation Sunday today... they joined us to help pave the way to some future ecumenical efforts... and they joined us as we were led our own kind of Reformation...

And this coming week... I'm going to attend a Conference that includes other Lutherans... Anglicans... and Roman Catholics... coming together in dialogue... and you know... it occurred to me years ago... that if we all... already learned... all of the lessons we need to learn... then none of us would have any good reason to be here... so there is more work to be done... there is more slavery to be freed from...

But the Greek word that's translated in today's Gospel as *truth*... can also be translated as *faithfulness*... it's not about our modern notion of truth as something that you can prove... as something that's right or wrong... as we're so used to thinking...

faithfulness... like love... is not something that can be videotaped... or measured... so we might have Jesus say... *If you continue in my Way... you are truly my disciples... and you will know faithfulness... and faithfulness will make you free...* and these words... and the words of Jeremiah point to that promise... that God will put God's law within us... and will write it on our hearts... and will then forget all our sins... because when we are faithful in following The Way of Jesus... when we the style of functioning we embody is the same one Jesus lived... we can sin no more... that may be why Pilate's question... What is Truth?... may be so difficult to answer... because there are many different ways of being faithful...

In a way... I think it's inevitable... that the *perfection of creation* is written into the *blueprint of creation*... is written into the Word that was in the beginning... maybe... at some point... because of the gift of free will... we could go kicking and screaming the other way... but why would we want to... why would we want to continue the tens of thousands of denials which we hold on to in our heads... while people who are hungry don't really have to be hungry... while people who are sick don't really have to be sick... and people who are discriminated against don't have to be... why would we want to continue the systemic abuse of the earth and the heels-dug-in resistance to wind and solar power so we can suck as much oil and tar sands out of the earth... and a few people get to build more barns to put their wealth in... why would we want to build weapons that kill instead of machines that heal... why would we want to support anything that's in opposition to God's perfect will for us... God's beloved children...

We're still on the wilderness journey... we're still pulling ourselves up out of slavery... we're still realizing how much power we do have... and figuring out how to overcome our divisions... like we did this week when three bishops came together... the Protestant Reformation may have reached its zenith at some point in 1517... but the reformation continues... God give us strength to engage it faithfully... Amen.

Mike+