

It is believed that this portion of John has been read as the Gospel text on Reformation Sunday for the last half century or so. And perhaps it would only be nerdy me who would be interested in looking back on five decades' worth of sermons to see how the perspective has changed with "If the Son makes you free, you will be free, indeed." Now, of course, the smart preachers would stick with sin, death, forces of evil: the seemingly theologically correct responses. But what if Martin Luther and Scripture and even Jesus Christ himself would invite you to dig a little deeper. If you had to be brutally honest, without the best scholars and pastors and the most intimidating Lutheran Confirmation teachers questioning you: deep-down, what else do you wish to be freed from?

Not long ago, I was a little more enthusiastic than I probably should have been about this free trial: one that would grant you this supposedly insider access to a subscription level service, albeit for a rather teasing briefest of time, to bypass all the commercials. And not that I wouldn't mind dealing with hearing how to achieve 0% APR financing when going to a specific dealership for a specific car in a specific timeframe, or even having to listen to JG Wentworth's catchy tune of getting my cash back now. Instead, it's the ones that insist on seizing your attention for 30 or so seconds to enter into a mindset of distrust, animosity, and flat-out human hatred, as if the belief of having us descend into the basest of our visceral emotions and our overall capacity, should impact on how we view other human beings, and how best we should care for one other in this world we are supposed to share. Of course, that rather infectious way of interacting with the depths of our being, does not tend to stop with those half of minute time-frames. It seems to be becoming an accepted standard operating procedure infiltrating so many aspects of social and even churchly life. So, you know what I want to be free from Jesus? That.

Or, on this Reformation Sunday, when we are almost given further permission for pride over Martin and Katie Luther, for Small Catechisms and 95 Theses, for church buildings not just made of brick and stone but by grace through faith, for our adoring music from Bach and Handel to those in our midst now who still captivate us with tunes that stick with us into the parking lot, for our memorable potlucks on the hottest days and the council meetings that lasted forever on the hottest nights, for so many living saints who had us falling in love with Jesus over and over again; so much pride bursting at the spiritual seams this weekend. But even Martin Luther would insist you look around at the church now, of what even the most stubborn German and Norwegian and Swedish descendants can do together with Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response and our outdoor camps and our colleges and seminaries and our local Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries and food pantries and sewing groups. So much to be proud of over half a millennia before and even now. And yet, when we are asked to look into the off-in-the-distant vista of the church, there seems to be this rather contagious uncertainty and fear and even hopelessness. As if the body of Christ will somehow lose its Holy Spirit relentless streak of word-living and sacrament-giving. As if the "Mighty Fortress" cannot somehow still be more than mighty in its love and compassion and grace and mercy and hope, just as much in the years to come as it was for the one German priest who took the church on a ride of a lifetime. You know what I want to be free of Jesus? That the church cannot somehow still rise with you.

Of course, that just as stubborn as any of us Martin Luther, with his academic and just as nerdy prowess as any Lutheran pastor ever since, would insist you not just think about being set free *from* something, but being set free *to* something as well, a holy something. And I have this feeling that our pride-filled past and more than its fair share of goodness present can still point us to a hope-bursting-at-any-church-building-seam future. Because there are these younger children of God out there who seem to thoroughly crave acting out the stories of Jesus Christ from long

ago: in feeding the hungry who seem to have nowhere else to turn and packing clothes together for those who desperately need them and crafting cards for the sick, who far too often feel separated from family and the church. The most precious and youngest of life seem to crave Christ's church that actually practices what it preaches. They seem to be under this holy impression: that they are supposed to be set free from obsessing over the sin and the death and the guilt and the shame, so that more of our God-filled energy of the Holy Spirit can be unleashed to serve in whatever way they possibly can; and not just to make a church look good, not to somehow create our own 30-second spot on social media to overcome the dismal ads from others, not just to convince us who are worried about the future, but because that seems to be where they find the Risen Christ, that seems to be where they come around to believing that the Lord is just as alive now as he was in 16th century Germany and long before that in Galilee. They seem to be under the holy impression that too much remains at stake to give up anytime soon. They seem to be under the impression that the Holy Spirit is chomping at our churchly bit, ready to keep on serving and loving and giving and even dying and rising. And no matter how our Lutheran and Methodist and Presbyterian and Baptist and Catholic buildings have not only managed to withstand all the cultural and social and religious reformings, the foundation of it all remains just as firm and absolutely invigorating as it ever has before: that Jesus Christ, is still Risen indeed, having already set us free to serve this world that God, for some holy reason, still loves now and will forevermore. So, for that Greatest News still for us all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!