

July 2, 2017 (Jesus Sets us Free/Sin Boldly)

Genesis 3.1-10

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It's kind of a strange juxtaposition, linking up our Reformation Theme for today (Jesus Sets us Free) with this scripture reading from Genesis, where Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

I mean, Jesus doesn't even show up in the reading; how's he supposed to set us free if he doesn't even show up in our story?

Well, just hang with me for a bit.

If you were here last Sunday, you'll remember that our theme for the week *also* dealt with freedom.

We heard from Martin Luther that, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," and *also* that, "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

And we ended last week with a series of questions, wondering what this freedom in Christ, *and* this servitude in Christ, looks like.

Essentially, we were pondering the question, “Because Jesus died and rose for us, how then shall we live? What do our lives look like on *this* side of the baptismal waters?”

It’s a question Luther himself struggled with 500 years ago as he realized more and more that he wasn’t just reforming the church, he was shaking nearly *every* aspect of life in Western Europe!

And it wasn’t just Luther who was struggling with this. *All* of the Reformers were, including Luther’s right-hand man, a guy named Philip Melanchthon.

Where Luther was brash and charismatic, Melanchthon was measured and reserved. They complemented each other perfectly.

But with all of his talk of reforms, Luther was making some very powerful people very angry. Eventually he was called in front of the Holy Roman Emperor, forced to defend his writings.

It didn’t work. The Emperor was not convinced and ordered Luther’s arrest, but before he could be captured, he was spirited away the safety of the Wartburg Castle.

While Luther was in hiding, it fell to Melanchthon to carry on the work of the Reformation.

But as the weight of this responsibility suddenly settled on his shoulders, Melanchthon grew nervous.

He was anxious and afraid of making decisions that could cause harm.

In other words, he was struggling with the same question *we* were left pondering last week: “How then shall we live? What is the right course of action?”

This question, “How then shall we live?” is really what Adam and Eve were dealing with in our story today.

They wanted what? ...the knowledge of good and evil.

They wanted to be able to make decisions about what is right and wrong, about what the right course of action is, about how to live *rightly*.

And they thought that if they had *that* knowledge they'd be *free*, no longer resigned to dependence on God, able to make their *own* way in the world.

So they ate. And indeed they *were* given the knowledge...but it didn't bring them freedom...it brought the opposite:

“They heard the sound of the Lord GOD walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord GOD. But the Lord GOD called to the man, and said to him, "Where are

you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid; and I hid myself.""

They weren't free...they were afraid.

That's what the knowledge brought them...fear...and shame...and a desire to run away and hide.

In short, their desire to be able to make decisions about how to live did *not* give them freedom...it enslaved them to sin.

And *this*, brothers and sisters in Christ, *this* is one of Luther's most incredible and *challenging* insights: every time *we* make decisions about what is right and wrong, about what the right course of action is, about how to live *rightly*, every time we make these decisions, we are *sinning*.

It doesn't matter if we choose to do 'good' or 'bad,' every ethical decision we make is participating in sin.

Because that's what Adam and Eve were after, right?

They wanted to be able to approach the world ethically, judging between what is right and what is wrong, choosing which path to follow.

They weren't specific in wanting to know *only* what was good; they wanted *all* the knowledge, so they took the forbidden fruit and they ate it!

And in the process, enslaved themselves to sin, subjected themselves to fear and shame, shackled themselves to anxiety.

This is the position Melanchthon found himself in. He was anxious and afraid of making decisions that could cause harm. He was struggling with that question, the question that drove Adam and Eve to eat the fruit: “How then shall we live?”

And in response to Melanchthon’s struggles, struggles that we have *all* faced in our lives as *we’ve* grappled with making the right decision, Luther gave one of the most intriguing pieces of advice in the entire *history* of people giving advice.

It’s pretty short so you’ll need to listen closely. Ready?

Luther wrote to Melanchthon, advising him to, “Be a sinner and sin boldly!”

Sin boldly!

When’s the last time you heard a preacher tell *you* to, “Sin boldly?”

This is yet another example of why I think that Luther should be the patron saint of college kids.

He tells Melanchthon to be a sinner and to sin boldly.

In other words, *because* we are sinning every time we make a decision about what is right and wrong, then there's no escaping sin.

To be alive in this world *means* that we will make these decisions about the right way to live, and *that* means that we will sin.

It doesn't matter if we're choosing to do something 'good' or something 'bad,' it doesn't matter if we're choosing to fire 30 employees or choosing to give our kids broccoli instead of another hot dog, it's still sin.

But instead of running away and hiding out of fear and shame and anxiety—like Adam and Eve—we *accept* this and grab hold of it. Be *sinner*s and sin *boldly*!

Why?

Because, as Luther goes on to write, “Be a sinner and sin boldly, *but* believe and rejoice in Christ even *more* boldly, for Christ is victorious *over* sin, death and the world!”

Why are we free to sin boldly? Because, through his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the world!

Why are we free to engage in making hard decisions, sometimes *extremely* hard decisions, about what the right course of action is? Because, through his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the world!

Why are we free from anxiety, fear, and shame? Because, through his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the world!

Why are we free to *live*? Because, through his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the world!

Be sinners, and sin boldly!

Thanks be to God! Amen.