

10/25/26
Reformation
For Group Meetings from October 18th – October 24th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 22:15-22) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: John 8:31-36

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What does Jesus mean when he says "If you continue in my word"?
2. How do the Judeans respond to Jesus statement that the truth will make them "free"?
3. What is the truth that Jesus talks about that will set people free?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When in your life have you felt most free? What made you feel that way?
2. Who or what helps you when you feel like life is out of your control?
3. When has following Jesus made you feel freer? When has it felt challenging or restrictive?

Memorize this verse: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32) Where do you see people confusing freedom with doing whatever they want?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 46. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

I suspect that the Gospel doesn't mean very much to someone who is "self-made." We define "Gospel" in a variety of ways – salvation, grace, forgiveness, life, and so on. This week Jesus adds another way to speak of the Gospel: freedom. Good words, all. But the common denominator among them is that they assume need. The one who values salvation knows that he or she needs saving. The one to whom grace is important is aware of the need for grace. No wonder Jesus' listeners are offended. Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." The promise of freedom – awesome! Except it's not, at least not to those to whom Jesus makes this promise. They are pretty much the opposite of excited by or grateful for Jesus' words, as they answer, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" No, "Thank you, Jesus." Instead, just a rather offended, "What do you mean?" or, probably even more, "Who do you think you are, anyway?!" And, truthfully, I understand. By offering them freedom, Jesus implies that they are not free.

Now, there is admittedly a certain absurdity to their reply: "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone." Really? Did you somehow forget the Egyptians? Or the Assyrians? Or the Persians? Or, take a look around, folks! – the Romans? As the old saying goes, "Denial. It ain't just a river in Egypt." But here's my question: are we really all that different? How good are we at naming and admitting our need, our hurt, our brokenness, even our mortality? Not in a "poor me" kind of way that invites pity or lends itself to manipulating the sympathies of others. But rather in the sense of honestly admitting that we aren't perfect, that our life isn't perfect, that there's room not just for growth and improvement but also for help, repentance, and forgiveness. That's not terribly easy to do. Especially not today, when there is so much cultural pressure to act as if you have it all pretty much together. In fact, a recent study indicated that four of the five most popular social media platforms increase negative feelings in users. It turns out you can only look at so many pictures of someone else's wonderfully happy and exciting life on social media before you begin to feel like yours doesn't compare very well and feel even more pressure to pretend you're perfect.

So what do we do? This is where our tradition can be helpful. Repentance. For Martin Luther, repentance is a kind of truth-telling that allows us to be honest about how we are deceiving ourselves or letting ourselves be deceived by the world (or both!), and that gives us an opportunity to think and speak and act differently. Or, to put it another way, to live in freedom. Jesus' invitation to freedom, however, requires us to face the truth about our need before we can fully recognize the freedom he offers. And that isn't easy for self-made men and women to admit. Which means that his promise of freedom may sound more like bad news before it sounds like good news. The truth that makes us free, the truth of the Reformation that we remember and celebrate this weekend, is that we are sinners from birth to death. No amount of indulgences or good works or good intentions or status updates or creative social media posts can redeem us. But we are also sinners who are simultaneously God's beloved children, whom God calls blessed and beloved. We are not perfect, and we don't have to be in order to be loved. But it's hard to trust that we're really loved if we're not honest first. And that is a truth that sets us free. It is a truth that still has the capacity to change lives, the church, and indeed the whole world.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen