

Jesu Juva

“Eleutherius”

Text: John 8:31-36; Psalm 46

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

At the time of the Reformation, it was not unusual for scholars to adopt a Greek form of their name for themselves, a pseudonym, or what we today would call a “pen name.” Luther did this. He had a name that he signed some of his writings with, and this name he chose for himself says pretty much all we need to know about him and his theology. For the name he chose for himself was: *Eleutherius* - the free one.

Now, if you were to ask folks to summarize what the Reformation was all about in one word, you might get answers like *sola*, for what became known as the three great *solas*, or “onlys,” of the Reformation - *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*; by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone. Others might think of the word *indulgences* - since that was a well-known problem at that time and something that Luther wrote against at the beginning of the Reformation. Non-Lutherans might say *heretic*, *rebel*, or *schismatic*.

But it is Luther himself who tells us what that one word really is, what the Reformation was all about: *freedom*. Because that is what the Gospel is all about. Freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from condemnation. Freedom from having to justify yourself. Freedom from worry and fear. Freedom from judgment. Freedom from having to earn God’s favor. Freedom *to live*. Because if you’re not free from all that other stuff, then you can’t really live. Not the life Christ has for you. Because you’re too busy trying to do what you think you have to do - to live up to other people’s standards, to live up to God’s standards, to be good, to show you’re worth something. That you’re better than most. You deserve to be a Christian. You deserve to be saved. Except you aren’t. And you don’t.

And if that’s how you’re living your life, then you know: that’s a terribly heavy burden to bear. And even if you manage for a while, and do good for a while and look good for a while, it wears you down and wears you out and will in the end crush you.

Which is exactly how satan wants it. And so what he’ll often do . . . I heard it put this way once: he’ll use mirrors like they often have at county fairs - the ones that distort what you look like. The first one he’ll hold up for you is the one that makes you look skinnier than normal, or shorter than you really are, to make you think you’re not as full of sin as you really are. See? You’re doing pretty well. Your sin is small. Keep up the good work!

Until the time is right . . . and then he'll get out that other mirror, the one that makes you look fatter than normal, or taller than you really are, that you see not only how full of sin you really are, but *magnify* it. To crush you. To make you think there's no hope for you. You've tried so hard, but look at you! You're no good at all. You're a failure. You're a disappointment. You're just one big fat blob of sin.

And I think all of you know what I'm talking about. I think all of you have been on that roller coaster. One day, doing alright, the next day, sin gets the better of you. One day filled with confidence and faith, the next day filled with doubt and despair. One day strong, the next day weak. One day in heaven, the next day in hell.

Luther rode that roller coaster, too. Until he stopped looking in those mirrors. Until he stopped trying to measure how well he was doing as a Christian, **and started looking at Christ**. And there he saw freedom. In Jesus on the cross, He saw **the free grace of the free God who makes His people free**. He saw the burden he was trying to bear being borne for him by Christ. He saw the sin and guilt he was trying to atone for atoned for by Christ. He saw the judgment he was so fearful of, and the punishment and condemnation he so deserved, poured out upon Christ instead. And once he saw that, that it was all on Christ and not on him, Luther was free! **Luther was *Eleutherius* - the free one.**

What he was unable to do, Christ had done for him. Christ was not an example for him to live *up* to, as he had been taught. Christ was the Saviour who had come *down* to him. To lift him up. To set him free. To forgive his sin and guilt. To give him life, and the promise of everlasting life. What Luther could not do, Christ did, and gave to him. *Sola gratia*. All grace. All gift. All free. And this was not just for others, but for him, for Luther. Because Jesus had done it for *all* people. And if for all, then for him, too. And so it was. Luther's. *Sola fide*. By faith. By faith this promise was for him, too. This promise that is what the Scriptures are all about. *Sola Scriptura*. Promise made, promise fulfilled, promise *yours*.

And Luther was free. Eleutherius. And so free that he couldn't not proclaim this freedom to everyone. The Son had set him free. And as we heard, ***if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed***. And not just Luther. You too. *An Eleutherius*. A free one. In Christ. A freedom not to do whatever your sinful nature wants. That's a fleshly freedom. That, as Jesus said, is slavery. ***Whoever sins is a slave to sin***, not free. Rather, this freedom is a true and real freedom. **The freedom of one so free that they become free even from themselves, from their urges and desires and wants, even from their own will to be free, and so become like Christ**. Lots of philosophies try to attain this, by your own work and effort - and *for yourself*. But only Christ can, and *for you*.

For how did Christ use His perfect freedom? Not for Himself. Rather, He came down from heaven to serve you, to die for you, to save you, to set you free. To make you an *Eleutherius*.

And that's not only what Christ did, in the past, but what He is still doing now. Making sinners like you and me free from our sin and guilt, free from our burdens and fears, free from having to justify ourselves and make something of ourselves, through His baptizing, absolving, proclaiming, feeding, forgiving, raising, saving. His gifts, for you, to make you free.

And ***abiding***, remaining, living *in* these words, ***His Word*** - proclaimed to you and poured upon you and fed to you - ***you are truly His disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free***. Or in other words, you will know Jesus, and Jesus sets you free.

Free to be like Him. Because if you're not burdened with a big, long list of things to do for yourself, then you can live for others. For imagine - or if you're like me, you don't have to imagine! - a big, long "to do" list. All urgent. All need to get done today. But your son, your daughter, your co-worker, your friend comes in and needs your help. What can you do? You have all these other things that you must do! So maybe you say no. Or maybe you sacrifice yourself for them, knowing that helping them now means you will have to stay up all night, or justify why you didn't get everything done.

But now imagine that someone comes along and takes that "to do" list away from you. They'll do it for you. You don't have to do any of it. So now, when your son, your daughter, your co-worker, or your friend comes in and needs your help - you can help! Why? Because you are free. An *Eleutherius*! That's what Christ has done for you!

Or think of it this way - this is how Luther put it: as a Christian, **you are perfectly free**. Your "to do" list for God has been taken away from you and done by Jesus. You are a child of God, pleasing to Him, loved by Him, and perfect for Him. There's nothing you have to do for your life, your forgiveness, or your salvation. It's all been done. You are an *Eleutherius*.

Now, therefore, as a Christian, **you are also perfectly bound**. But this is something new - not a slavery-like bondage, a forced service of the God who has set you free. No! It is rather that the love that has set you free now lives in you. The love that has set you free now controls you. The love that has set you free is bound to erupt from you for others, to give to them. That's **the freedom of one so free that you become free even from yourself, your urges and desires and wants, even from your own will to be free, and so become like Christ**. And do what Christ freely did.

That's the freedom of a Son. The freedom that the Son gives to you. The freedom only He *can* give. The freedom that is by grace alone, by faith alone, and known by Scripture alone. The freedom that no work of yours can achieve, and no amount of money can indulge. The freedom that the Reformation was all about.

And it is a freedom that spills into all areas of your life. For you do not live two lives: one

physical and one spiritual. One earthly and one churchly. One secular and one religious. No. You have one life that Christ has set free, and set you free to live. And so now *all* that you do is with that freedom, confident that you are alive in the love of God, forgiven by Him, and pleasing to Him. So you are free for loving service to your neighbor - in all your vocations. At work, at school, even your chores at home - all now seen through the lens of Christ and His freeing love for you. Christ living in you to love and serve and bless the people He has given to you and given you to.

And this is a freedom that does not come and go with the ups and downs in your life, but one that lasts. One that lasts, as we heard in the psalm, *though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea*. One that lasts when *nations rage*, and *kingdoms totter*. Freedom because *the Lord of hosts is with you; the God of Jacob is your fortress*.

So you learned a new word today - *Eleutherius*, the free one. That's what Luther called himself, and that's what you are. Which is not just wishful thinking, but truth, because Christ says so. He said it when He baptized you and made you His child, so that you are **set free** and no longer a child of sin and death. He says it when He absolves you and **sets you free** from your sin and guilt: *I forgive you all your sins*. All. None excluded. And He says it when He places His Body and Blood into your mouth - His Body and Blood *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*. Go, **you are free**. Depart in peace.

So it is finished, Jesus said on the cross, and says to you now. What is? Your "to do" list! Jesus did it all, finished it all. So you . . . you are free. *Eleutherius*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.