

Daily Discipleship

October 31, Reformation Day (A,B,C) – John 8:31-36

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Freedom*

Focus Question: *When have you experienced “freedom”?*

word of life

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:31 (NRSV)

Read John 8:31-36

It is easy to imagine Jesus shaking his head in response to the comments of the Jews. Like a loving parent left speechless when a child totally misses the point, Jesus might have even given a deep sigh as he tried again to help them make sense of “freedom.”

Already, Jesus has attempted to connect the dots for his listeners. It’s a simple equation:

Continue in my word = know the truth = be set free

But to the Jews, the equation does not add up. They challenge the need to be freed and claim to have never been slaves to anyone. Apparently, they have forgotten their own ancestors enslaved in Egypt and forced to make bricks. These ancestors cried out to God for freedom, and God sent Moses to lead them to freedom. Each year in the Festival of the Passover, the Jews remember their gift of freedom.

1. *Why did the Jews who responded to Jesus have so much trouble understanding freedom?*

Yet the history of Israel is not only a story of freedom, but it also includes years of occupation by foreign governments including the Assyrians and Babylonians. During the life of Jesus, it is Rome who occupied the land. The Jews have limited freedom in their own country, a land promised and given to them by God. Many had hoped the Messiah would overthrow the Roman government and return freedom to Israel. But Jesus offers a new perspective.

2. *What made it so difficult for the listeners to comprehend Jesus?*

3. *What did they need to be freed from?*

Jesus is not dealing with enslavement to a government or political structure. Instead, Jesus focuses on sin and being a slave to sin. Sin is more than an error or failure. Jesus paints a bigger picture than that. Sin is separation from God and includes all that becomes a barrier between people and God. Sin often blinds us from seeing our own enslavement to sin. This is what happened to the Jews in John 8.

The Jews seem to be so enslaved to the correctness of their own heritage; that they miss who Jesus is and his message for them. Jesus urges them to stay connected and rooted in the Word.

4. *What is the relationship between being a disciple of Jesus, the Word, and freedom?*

5. *Describe a person who “continues in the Word.”*

word among us

Bills, fears, expectations, loneliness, deadlines, diets, illness, depression, perfection, insecurities, illusions, responsibilities, to-do-lists, house repairs, meetings! Help! When will we be free?

1. *What enslaves and burdens us? (Take a moment and write your list.)*
2. *How would this list have been different ten years ago?*

Quick, rush to the book store to find the latest self-help book to repair your life. On second thought, follow the advice of Jesus and return to the Word to be comforted *and* challenged. There we not only encounter the love of the living God in Jesus Christ, but we also have a standard of his sacrificial life-giving love for our own lives. There we discover that freedom comes with being rooted in the amazing love and grace of God.

3. *How can God's Word free us?*
4. *Recall a time when God's Word has helped to help put things in perspective?*

Freedom does not mean doing whatever *I* want, whenever *I* want and with whomever *I* want. That's an empty road. That is sin at work, seducing each of us to live only for *me, myself* and *I*. We dare not underestimate the power of sin to sabotage life, goals, relationships, and devotion to God. Sin is a powerful force. None of us can by our own efforts become freed. Jesus offers this reminder: Continue in my word = know the truth = be set free.

5. *What does it mean to "continue in my word"?*

The challenge of being a disciple is to align life with Jesus while the rages of sin rush through our spiritual system. It's like keeping the tires of our car aligned while daily driving on roads filled with potholes. After a while, we scarcely remember there is another way. Remaining in the Word reminds us of the proper alignment with Jesus Christ.

6. *Describe your life as if it was more firmly and rooted in God's Word.*
7. *What if anything would change?*
8. *When do you feel firmly anchored in Christ and God's Word?*

Freedom is a gift from God for those willing to claim it. But here is the irony. We cannot claim the gift of freedom until we know we cannot save ourselves. That knowledge is the very place that we are found, forgiven and freed as a free gift of God in Jesus Christ (See Ephesians 2:4-9).

9. *What is God freeing us to do or be?*
10. *How do you feel about being free?*

Prayer

Christ, free us from the shackles which bind and loosen our hearts to love. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 7:14-20

last word

This week,
stay in God's Word and read John 8:31-36 each day.
Seek to name all which shackles
you from claiming
freedom in Christ.
Offer your list to God in prayer.



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