

*31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."*

I was a freshman in college. I was six hundred miles from home. When I first came to college I did not know a single person in the state of Iowa. I was lonely, I was afraid.

I remember walking across the campus on a cold October's day. "I won a scholarship," I told myself. "I am somebody because I won a scholarship." I needed a place to stand.

Firm ground: a place that was still in my quaking world - everyone was laughing and dancing, knowing where they were going and how to get there, and I was afraid, and lost - alone. I needed firm ground.

I remember going to see Grandpa, he was in his eighties. "I was never sick a day in my life," he bragged. "I was a better ballplayer than Elmer Smith," he boasted. (Elmer Smith had played ball against my grandfather as a teenager, and later starred for the Indians in the 1920 World Series.) "I could outwork any man," my grandfather proclaimed.

But the man who spoke these words was confined to bed – failing - year by year moving closer to the day of his death. He thought his words of what had been might be firm ground on which he could stand while his world was quaking.

Firm ground: What's yours? I raised my children well? My income is in six figures? I'm on the honor roll? My home is beautiful? My dog is there to greet me when the day's work is done? I am a good person, try my hardest, do my best?

When your world starts quaking, to where will you run? Is your wife your one certainty? Your work? Your savings? Friends you can count on? The sharpness of your mind?

*Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."*

*They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"*

They were talking about their certain rock, one thing that would stay firm in a quaking world. For them it was that they were descendants of Abraham.

*Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."*

The mother who places her hopes in her children is a slave, she is not free. One moment they are all shiny and bright and she feels so very free. The next they are confused, or lost and her world is quaking.

Once mansions lined the near east side of Cleveland. Some crumbled in changing economic times, some were worn by age, some just made mistakes, but their builders are all gone now, firm ground quaked. Homes built to last forever have been abandoned.

Good deeds - surely they would be the firmest of firm ground - trying your hardest, doing your best. God will remember. Then come the words: "Why is this happening to me?" Not even good deeds will keep the ground still.

Nor even being a descendant of Abraham.

In the letter to the Romans Paul gathers up everything and everyone in these words: "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."

Every mouth silenced: My mouth - my grandfather's mouth - every father and mother's mouth - every worker's mouth - every executive's mouth silenced. Silenced, so that there is nothing to point to, nothing to stand upon, nothing to hope in apart from the only Son of God. For sin and death gobble up everything, everything we are and do and build. Sin and death even gobbled up the only Son of God.

There is only silence.

Every mouth silenced.

Silence.

Until the voice that called light into existence, sun and moon and every star, and dogs and cats and you, out of the silence speaks: "Jesus, come forth from the tomb!"

And the wrappings of death are left behind, and he is free. Forever free.

If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

There is no firm ground except the Son of God.

Continue in him and in his word, and you will be free indeed.

So free that a man at the end of life might be looking ahead, rather than backwards?

Yes, that free.

So free that a woman would not judge herself or others by her own accomplishments or failures? Yes, that free.

So free that a parent would no longer be like a yo-yo, up and down with the lives of his children? Yes, that free.

*If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.* That is Jesus' promise to you.

*If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*