

*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."*

Beth had a fire in the house where she lives at school. I called my insurance agent to ask what I needed to do to file a claim.

"Is she in on-campus housing?" was his first question.

"Off-campus," I replied.

"She's not covered," he said.

I couldn't believe my ears: Not covered? I felt betrayed - betrayed by him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I cried. "All the times we have talked and you never said anything. I'm getting a new insurance agent – goodbye," I slammed down the phone.

I paced around my office for a few minutes, felt ashamed for being such a fool. I should have known better. How could I be so stupid?

Then I sat down to begin this sermon.

Reformation Sunday: "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*" is Jesus' promise. Suddenly I had a whole new way to think about you, myself, and God's word.

I rely on my insurance agent to know what I need for protection, and to let me know. What are the things I need to do to be covered? I trust that I am not going to run into surprises like the one on Friday morning.

You count on me in that same way when it comes to God and God's word. You do not come here to hear my opinions, something that might be true or might not be true. Your eternal life is at stake here. Think of your rage if at the last judgement you were to find out that I had it all wrong and you are left outside the kingdom because you believed what I proclaimed.

When Martin Luther took a stand against some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church he believed that God was revealing God's truth to him through God's word. The Roman Catholic Church was declaring that those who were in good standing with the church were in good standing with God. Luther said, "No - those who have faith in Jesus Christ are in good

standing with God. Jesus Christ saves from sin and death and the power of Satan - not good works - not the church nor earthly power nor wealth. Jesus Christ wins the victory over sin and death and the power of the devil through his death for you on the cross.

As the hymn says, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Now it was one thing for Luther to believe this for himself. But he took upon himself the awesome responsibility to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only source of eternal salvation. People would not be saved by pieces of paper from the church but by being joined to Christ in holy baptism. People are saved through receiving the body and blood of Christ in faith, trusting in him. People are saved as they hear Christ proclaimed and believe, trust, hope in him.

Because of the stand that Luther took families were divided, wars were fought, the body of Christ was divided.

The other day a man came to see me. He had been at a party, heard Missouri Synod and ELCA members arguing heatedly about who should be welcomed at Holy Communion. This man who was not Lutheran was scandalized by the volume of their arguing.

Does what we proclaim and believe and practice matter? Does it matter enough for us to be divided? Or is maintaining peace more important than truth? Is God basically just a nice God who would never deny anyone coverage on their eternal life policy?

Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*"

Sometimes we have acted as if the truth of which Jesus speaks could be printed within the words of a catechism.

Or memorized, or learned through a confirmation program.

Sometimes parents get their children confirmed and think that will be good enough. Or people belong to the church and think their belonging counts for something.

But Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the truth - not facts about Jesus, not our ideas about what God is like, but Jesus is the truth, Jesus is the way, Jesus is the life.

The same man who was offended by Lutherans arguing with one another asked about what it took to join this church. I talked about classes, learning.

He said to me, "But isn't there some kind of declaration or promise?"

Then he told me of the promises he had made when he joined the church to which he now belongs.

He declared his faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

He promised to seek to live by faith in Christ and his word and to let Christ guide him in all things.

When I heard that I thought: How appropriate to ask people to declare that they intend to trust in Christ and live by Christ's word.

I assume that is why you are here, to live by faith in Christ and to live according to his word.

Friday morning after I had hung up on my insurance agent I thought about Christ. I knew that Christ was not nearly so upset about my financial losses as Christ was upset with me, hurting another believer.

I called my agent back. I am sorry, I began.

He responded to my apology with one of his own, and told me that he had called the company, that it looked like my losses would be covered.

But whether they are or whether they are not, living by faith in Christ matters more – more for me – more for you. If I told you anything else then I would be failing you. Jesus Christ is the solid rock for your life. Follow him, his word and you will never go astray. Believe in him and live for him and you will have eternal joy.

Jesus died and was raised again that you might have that joy.