

*31Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33They 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'?" 34Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

Some weeks ago Sue and I walked in the Metro Parks. As we walked we passed a series of exercise stations. Now I am not so foolish to stop at the chin up bars, nor to stop at those boards built on an incline to make leg lifts almost impossible. But when we passed the four-by-fours laid out as a path to walk upon, I stopped. It wasn't particularly challenging to walk on a board this wide, four inches from the ground, but I could do it.

Later I thought about that. If that board were sixty feet in the air, instead of resting on the ground, sixty feet up with no railing or support, could I walk on it then? The board would be the same, I would be the same person, but even thinking about doing it makes my knees get all mushy. The difference would be fear, fear that would probably cause me to teeter and fall.

Yet some walk on girders high in the sky. Some do, can I? Or will fear always own me, rule over me, keep me down on the ground?

The other day I was a grump. I would have made a great character for a Dr. Seuss book. The Grump. Well, Sue decided that she could be a character in that book too, called The Tickles. The Grump meets the Tickles. She almost got me. The dark cloud was beginning to break up, the sunlight was about to burst through. But I slipped from her grasp, convinced her that tickling of ribs was not allowed, and hung on to the gloom and the doom.

Why did I not let the tickles have their way, let go, laugh? Part of me wanted to. But part of me was afraid - afraid to let go, and soar - afraid to leap out into space, not knowing where I would land - afraid to let another be powerful over me - in control of me even for a few moments.

Every year at this time, I stand in the middle of you all and read Jesus' word to you. *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

Free. That's what I want to be. Free. Free from fear. Free to soar and fly. Free to walk on girders way up in the sky.

Free.

Free to let go and trust. Free to believe that if I let go, another's hands will break my fall. Free.

How about you? Do you want to be free like that too? Free of fear, every fear so that everyone could see the loving wonderful person that is inside of you. Free to be generous with compliments, "My, how nice you look today!" And not to have to wonder what they will think if you say that.

Free to hear of the suffering of another and to shed a tear - free to feel with them and for them.

Free to speak to strangers, free to go beyond the boundaries that have limited you, and to know that the whole world is yours.

Free.

Free to see the needy one beside the road and stop, no longer ruled by fear for your safety.

Free to go where people really need your love - where you could every day make the kind of difference that God has created you to make.

Free to laugh and cry and be real.

Free.

That is why you are here today, because you know Jesus is free like that. You know that he lived and died to make you free as he is - free from fear, free from sin, free from death.

Most of you have been around here long enough to know how Jesus makes you free; in his dying and being raised from the dead, Jesus has opened heaven itself for you. He has vowed God's eternal love for you. With his dying and rising Jesus has built your road to God, your path to eternal life. Nothing in all creation can keep you from God now. If you should sin, you remain a child of God, if you fall or fail, you remain a child of God. If you die, not even death can have any power over you. Trust God and what he has done in Christ with your whole heart and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

Today it is the Sunday of the Reformation. For a long time we have celebrated this day, priding ourselves on our knowledge of the truth. We have memorized our catechism, learned how to answer the questions, and thought that if we can just say we believe the right things, God will give us the prize of eternal life. ,

Now that is foolishness. No one will be saved by what they know. For the truth is not some ideas, some facts - propositions to be believed. The truth is Jesus Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus said. We are not called to believe facts, but to put our lives in his hands - to trust in him above anything else. Jesus is the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by him.

Finally it is not what happens up here, in our heads that makes us free, but it is taking the chance. I could sit here and think about being sixty feet up in the air, walking out on a girder. I can think about that for the rest of my life, and yet would be no closer to doing it.

If I ever would overcome my fear of heights, I would need to face that fear, little by little. First put the four by fours a foot off the ground, then two, then three and four – risking - increasing the risk, and one day I could walk on the girders without fear.

Two weeks ago Pastor Sering said again and again, "We don't think ourselves into a new way of acting, but by doing new things we come to a new way of thinking.

*"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

In Christ we are free - free from sin, free from death, free. But unless we venture out, and let go of ourselves, risk ourselves, our freedom will be only words.

In Christ you are free to trust in God. But unless you do that freedom means nothing.

In Christ you are free to embrace your sisters and brothers, free to love them, free to risk letting others know you and accept you. But unless you do that, your freedom means nothing.

In Christ you are free to fail, to fall down and get up again, to take the chance to say words that might not be the right words. You are free to do that, but unless you do, your freedom means nothing.

Maybe you don't need to walk sixty feet in the air, or to lose your grumps to the tickles. But you do know what is keeping you this very day from being the person God has created you to be. Trust in Christ who is the truth, take the risk now. For Jesus promises, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Now.