

*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."*

Some items from my checklist this week: Call Lois to see how she is doing. Take communion to Evelyn Heiby. Prepare the sermon. Rewrite the newsletter article (I wrote an article last week but I knew it was not very good.) Thank people that put together the wonderful celebration of my birthday last Sunday.

As the week goes by each day I check off some items – by Saturday I hope to have the list finished.

Do you make lists of things to do? It is a great feeling to be able to cross off an item – finished – complete.

Maybe we should put together a list of “to do’s” for God. We could publish the list in the newsletter. Then we could check off the items as we complete them. Wouldn’t it be great to know that we were done with everything God demands?

Let’s see – baptism – confirmation (declaring our faith in Christ) - giving to the church - giving to the poor - weekly attendance at worship – daily prayer – confessing our sins – telling others about Christ – reading the scriptures. What if we could check each one of these? Could we check God off of our list then? Would we be done with God then?

Jesus said, “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.”

The idea of a teacher and his disciples from Jesus time was a teacher sitting and the disciples in a circle at his feet learning. Kind of like a classroom – teaching – questions – disciples learning the truth from the master.

Maybe we have thought of confirmation like that. A pastor sits with the students for two years or three and they learn truth. When I was young that truth was memorized, I studied so that I could repeat word for word what Luther had written and the Bible verses to support his teaching. When the learning was complete I was confirmed – like checking all of that off.

But when I think of Jesus and his disciples I never picture them sitting – learning but moving – on the road – going from place to place. Jesus instructing his disciples was not in a synagogue but right out in life. They were disciples not so much in their learning but in their following.

Jesus did not teach: “If you learn my word” but “if you continue in my word you are truly my disciples.” He is talking about living his word. Continue means we are never done – never able to check it off and forget about it. To be a disciple of Jesus is an everyday, all of the time following.

“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.”

When I grew up I got the impression that Lutherans knew the truth and everyone else did not. We were a little like the Pharisee who prayed in the temple and thanked God that he was not like other people. We were proud that we did not believe in praying to the saints and to Mary as the Catholics did and we were proud that we did not believe that the bread and the wine just represented the body and blood of Christ as the Presbyterians and United Church of Christ did. We were sure we knew the truth and that truth was setting us free – free to know that we were better than everyone else.

Jesus told his disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me.” Jesus is the truth – not some teaching about Jesus or teaching of Jesus but Jesus himself. Being known by him we are made free from sin and death and whatever could separate us from God. Continuing in his word, being his disciples, knowing him we are free.

There is no checklist for Lutherans – no things we can do to take care of our God obligation. That is what Luther found out – when he was trying to satisfy God he learned that there was no amount of sorrow for sin or money or obedience that could do that. The harder Luther tried the more he knew that he came up short. But through the study of the scriptures he came to realize that God had sent Christ to satisfy all that God demanded and that Christ is ours through faith. Christ freed Luther – both in his dying and rising and in Luther’s knowing Christ in faith.

There is no checklist – only Christ. Believing in Christ, receiving Christ in word and sacrament – following Christ in our living and praying and serving we do know the one who is the truth and we are free. Not just free from sin and death but free to love God and love our neighbors – free to live in the joy of faith in Christ.

It does not matter to God whether people are Lutheran or not but whether your heart and mind and life is in Christ. Christ is the very life of God given for you – given to you. Forever. Amen.