

Reformation  
Sunday, Oct. 30, 2011

Lives Tell the Story  
John 8:31-36

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

On Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses arguing against the practice of selling indulgences to church door in Wittenburg, where he served as a university professor and pastor. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Over the past almost 500 years, the Luther and Lutheran story has been told from almost all conceivable angles – the economic revolution, the political upheaval, the social transformation, the surge in national pride and interest, the practical, theological honesty and the ethical implications of his thought and so on and so on. Yet, after 500 years, it seems the story has run its course and these rich roots seem to have little life left in them. This festival, with its red paraments and vestments proudly posted as a witness to our confession of the Holy Spirit's work in this venture, seems itself a relic of a bygone time when national, ethnic and denominational pride were all rolled up in one. I do not know if anyone would have really minded if this Sunday pastor and I would have donned our green stolls and we continued without interruption the succession of Sundays after the Pentecost – this would be the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Does it really matter anymore that we call ourselves Lutheran Christians?

There once was a rich and very successful man, and he had two sons who were partners with him in the family business. The younger son tired of his father, his father's house, the hard work of maintaining and sustaining the business, so he told his father he wanted to cash out his shares and go his own way. With his small fortune he moved to the city and lived a glamorous and luxurious life. This left the older son to stay at home and bear even more the burden of the business. He resented his father, but even more his brother, because his brother's rebellion combined with his guilt-ridden sense of family duty conspired to trap him in miserable, passionless life of drudgery. So, this older son took more than a little pleasure in the news that his brother had now lost everything and was working odd jobs to feed himself. Made him feel better about his own slavish existence.

It didn't take long for the younger son to realize that life at home with Dad and working in the family business – even at an entry level position – beat the life of suffering he was living

now. So he went home. Back to Dad. Back to the old business, and he wondered if there was a place for him, any place. So what's a father to do? He welcomed him in; reinstated him as a partner and threw a huge party to celebrate his return. That was too much for his older brother – who now saw his share in the business once again diminished by the presence of his good-for-nothing younger sibling. He's furious, and threatens to walk out on the family and the business.

His Dad however sees things differently. He says, a child is a child and a son is a son and an heir is an heir of all that we share. You're working like a slave because you think the business is about business – about profit and loss; production and costs and all that other stuff – but it's not that. It's what we do, together. And so there's room in our heart and home and business to welcome back the son and heir who didn't know who he was or what he was until now.

There are many different ways that we are enslaved. Some of us are caught up and entangled by our own passions, desires and outright rebellion against God and human beings; Some of us feel stuck in passionless, loveless relationship with God and neighbor, chained in place by guilt and sense of duty and obligation to do the right thing even if it kills us. How sad for us. How sad that we do not realize God's love for us or recognize God's grace at work in our life. This Christian life is a life, a relationship, a network and complex of relationships in which we are free to love and live as heir of all God's promises. The son, Jesus Christ, has shown us God's heart, God's love, God's desire and purpose for us to be with us, together forever.

I think the children of this planet need to hear the father's word of love without conditions, forgiveness without retribution, life that destroys death. The people you work with, the people you live with, the people you ride the train with, the people you play with, the people in your family and throughout your various social networks need to hear someone tell them that they are loved because they are God's own child. They need to hear it ... as much as you need to hear it today. The Son has set you free. You are free indeed!

Maybe that's why Lutheran Christians still matter. To remind ourselves and this sin-enslaved world that what's precious in this world is not a commodity, but love of God that will not let us go on as slaves and ciphers. To remind ourselves and this world that it's God's precious grace that sets us free to be the children of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.