

Reformation Sunday October 30 2022

John 8:31-36

It is almost Halloween. A time to sit around campfires or that one flashlight in a darkened room and tell stories. Any of you have memories of that?

There are many stories out there. Stories that we dive deeply into, like Game of Thrones or it's offshoot House of the Dragon. Harry Potter. Lord of the Rings. Stories like Breaking Bad, Stranger Things, and other series that we consume and are consumed by. That we use as a shorthand to interact with the world.

There are other stories that our culture tells us. About who you are, where you came from, what you can do or can't do. That tell us what our relationship is with the created world and each other. Some tell us that if we buy a certain product, follow a particular influencer, join this political party, root for this team- then we will have what we most desire- fame, money, success, relationships, influence, happiness, freedom. These stories compete for our attention and loyalty. But are any of them the truth?

Let me tell you a story.

The created world is amazing. You know this through your eyes. The colors of the trees, the beauty of a fall sunset. The images captured by the Webb space telescope. The created world is vast and awesome. It is intricate and complex.

And it was not created by us. We didn't build it from the ground up. It sprang from the same place we did, from God. Scripture, the Bible-both the Hebrew

Scriptures and the New Testament- tells us a story of what was and what is. A truth we experience every day.

The truth that the created world is filled with wonder and awesomeness. That humans are different from any other creature in the world. That we have within us something that sets us apart. Something that allows us to create I-phones, rockets to the stars, the ability to peer into the smallest particles. To capture the power of the sun, create new compounds, to make life better.

And.

The truth that this world is not a paradise. Death can stalk the land coming for everyone like COVID or some like cancer. There is war, death, and disease. We, humans, do and say things that hurt one another. We kill 6 million people because they are Jews. Or 3 million in Cambodia in an attempt to create a classless agrarian society. A human attempt at creating perfection that only leads to death and destruction.

This is so because the truth is that we as humans have gone our own way, believing- as the story of Adam and Eve show us- that we can make the decisions about what is good and what is evil. That we can take the place of God. Create our own Garden of Eden. And the truth is that never works out well. History- both distant and recent show this to be true. How, even when trying to create something good, it will almost inevitably rebound in some way to cause great harm.

The story of scripture, the true story, is the story of the God who created this perfect and complex and intricate world, and that God's pursuit of us. God's

attempt to recall us humans back into right relationship with God and each other. This is not for God's ego, because God needs our relationship, because God is on a power trip and doesn't want a failed project on Her resume. Rather it is because God loves us human beings and wants what is best for us. Like a parent with a wayward child, God reaches out time and again seeking to restore this relationship.

A covenant- a sacred contract with Abraham. Freedom from slavery in Egypt through Moses. Through the words conveyed by prophets and kings, God reaches out time and again to call God's beloved creation, us- created in God's very image- back into right relationship again. And time and again we fall short.

Abraham and Sarah try and fulfill God's promise of a child on their own and succeed only in creating strife in their household. Moses and the Israelites wander in the wilderness for a generation because they immediately turn to gods of their own creation rather than the God who brought them out of Egypt. Because they trust themselves and their wisdom rather than God's.

The truth is, on our own, we will always fall short. That in many ways, we are doomed to die.

And

God does not give up on us. God's love for us, for you, is so strong God says I will send my Son. Surely, they will listen to him. And so, Jesus- God in the flesh- came among us. Two thousand years ago. Not as a strong ruler, a powerful religious leader, a warrior. Forcing people to do what was right. Worship the One True God, Love one another or get smacked upside the head. But as a child born to

humble parents from the rural parts of Palestine. Emmanuel- God with us- raised as the son of a woodworker in a small town.

And at the age of thirty, after his baptism, Jesus began to speak. And Jesus told us the truth.

That we are bound by sin and death and cannot free ourselves. That our stinkin' thinkin' keeps getting us in trouble and that leads ultimately to death no matter how much we think we're doing what God required.

Because it is not just about what we do- you shall not kill. It is also about what you think- have you gotten so angry at someone you think, even for a moment, of smashing their head in? You've as good as killed them and deserve punishment for that.

And we can't help ourselves. That's the truth of the story up to this point. That no matter how hard we try- with all of God's prophets and kings. With commandments and covenants. We always fall short.

So, God handles it directly, through Jesus. Because God created all that exists and can do that.

You want to know the truth? The story that tells it like it really is?

Listen to Jesus in our Gospel today. "If you continue in my word, you will remain my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Literally it is if you abide, dwell, live, remain in my word. If you make camp with your life in my word, in me- Jesus. If you steep yourself in this story. Get

seasoned by this story. Embody this story. You will have personal experience of the truth. Of Jesus. And this truth, this Jesus, will set you free.

Free from sin and death that comes when we live life on our own. Free from the need to be in charge. Free from having to prove ourselves.

Because, as the story told to us in the Gospel of John reminds us. God has so loved this creation, so loved us, that God sent God's own son Jesus not to condemn the world. Not to give up on us or anyone in this world. To hold the power button and do a hard reboot. But to give us life. Life in and through Jesus. Life free from all that binds us.

Life that truly is life.

A life given to us when we were like Jesus on that Christmas morn. A child, held in our mother's arms. Able to do nothing for ourselves. Given a bath and a promise. A claiming, just like God claimed God's own Son in a very public and real way. When we too hear the words of promise, "Beloved Child of God, you are mine, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever and nothing can change that."

And in that moment, we join the story. We are set on the journey of following Jesus. Of abiding, remaining, dwelling in his presence- because that is the only place to find the truth. To be able to have God's Word pierce through all these other stories which ultimately lie to us. Which are so much sound and fury that signify- nothing.

This is the story that we Affirm is the North Star in our lives at Confirmation. The one we continue to Affirm, choose over and over again. Each week, as we

assemble around the Word of God proclaimed and the Meal that is Jesus shared. As we dwell, abide, remain in the presence of Jesus embodied in this community. Then we are free indeed. And little by little, with the help of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, through the support of this community, we begin to live into that reality in deed and in truth.

The truth is that you are chosen, beloved, gifted by God's Holy Spirit with skills and abilities unique to you. Ones necessary for the work of God's church on earth. One's that when used as disciples of Jesus will give witness to the story of God's love for the world in Jesus and be a beacon of truth in a world filled with gilded lies. Deep fakes.

Martin Luther and the Reformers cut through layers that had been placed over this story. Probably because the truth of it is so powerful, but it is also painful. Like I talked about last week. To see the truth of what we have given ourselves to and left this wonderful gift behind.

In this story of Jesus, Son of God, healer, teacher, bearer of good news. In this God human one killed on a cross for loving, healing, teaching everyone. In his resurrection from the dead which breaks it's hold on our lives. In this Jesus we find life. As these children of our congregation affirm their baptism today, step more fully into this story, may we affirm our own place in this story. And abide, dwell, remain in the love of God in Jesus Christ for all people. Leaving aside all other stories but this one. Living in this one. Trusting in the truth, which makes us free.

Thanks be to God.