

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

27th October 2024 – Reformation

John 8:31-36

TRUTH AND FREEDOM

What is the truth? How do you define it? How do you know it? How important is it to know what is the truth and what isn't; does it always matter? Is the truth something which is forever and always the same, or does it change?

Is there a way to answer all of those questions in the right way, that is, the way that is the truth? The truth can sometimes be something which is different for each of us, can't it, eg, what is the best ever band, sports player, best food, etc. The truth can be something which changes at different times; once the truth was that it took a long time to travel to another country from Australia, but now we can fly to most parts of the world in less than a day's travelling time. Sometimes a truth that we might think is absolute and unchangeable, eg that the earth is round, well, you don't have to look very far and you will find someone who will argue with you about that. Some people might get really caught up on truths that we don't think are really that important.

Nowadays with smart phones in our pockets many of us are connected to the internet all 24/7, the source of all kinds of 'truths'. That is a great thing, but we know that some of the answers we find there will be stretching the idea of what we think is the truth. When we were young, for most of us what our parents told us was the truth. As teenagers that often went the opposite way; most of what they told us was wrong. As adults, a kind of balance is found were we both believe and trust what our parents told and taught us, but also discover our own truths.

What is the truth? How do we know it? What does it matter or mean for us?

Jesus, and the Bible as a whole, talk a lot about truth and the freedom it brings to us. In our reading here He says, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' What is that truth? It's the truth of God's love for each one of us, the truth which is shown in the story of the Bible . It's not a truth which changes every day, or even during the course of a day. This truth of God's love has always been there, and it always will be. For each one us, for each one of you, there is nothing which can change this story. Google God's love and you will get a whole heap of different truths come back to you; some good and helpful, some not so much. Come to God's Word and you will get only one; that God loves you so much that He will do everything He can to keep you with Him, including sending Jesus to die and rise again so you can live with Him. That is the truth God brings to us, the truth which Jesus lived and died for, and the truth into which some of you are confessing publicly before us today.

As well as being a big Confirmation and First Communion celebration in our congregation, today is also Reformation Day. Back in 1517 Martin Luther saw how the truth of God's love was being wrongly taught so he made up a list of 95 things the church was teaching which were wrong, and nailed them to the door of his local church. From that stand Luther took for the truth not only came our own church and many others, but later a changing of the teachings of the Catholic Church itself. In this scene here Luther was on trial for speaking out, and he made the famous statement, 'Here I stand, I can do no other'. Here I stand. Was he standing on his opinion, or on his interpretation, or something he himself had come up with as a version of the truth? No, he was standing firm on the truth as he found it in God's Word. That was the unchangeable thing for Luther. Five hundred years later this truth is just as true for us today.

But is it just having the truth for the sake of it? No. What does Jesus say again here? “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Truth and freedom go together, don’t they? Sometimes when leaders want to control their people, they control the ‘truth’ the people are told. Truth equals freedom, especially the ultimate truth of God’s love and forgiveness for us. Martin Luther knew that and that’s why he risked his life to teach people the true message of God’s Word. Jesus knows that, which is why He says the truth of God’s love will set us free. Even the devil knows that, which is why he uses the confusion of different truths around us to try and take us away from God. By staying close to God through His Word, by remembering our Baptism, by regularly coming to His meal in Holy Communion, and by gathering together with other Christians, we live in the truth of God’s love, the great truth that will never change. The truth that frees us from guilt, from the power of sin, from having to find meaning and freedom for ourselves. It is the truth that saves, and the truth that frees us to live for Him.

To the young people confirming your faith today, the adults coming into membership of the Lutheran Church, and the young people receiving Holy Communion for the first time, today you are taking another step in living your faith in this freeing, life-giving truth. It is the prayer of each one of us here, and of all your family and friends elsewhere, that you will always hold firm to the things you say today. Above all, don’t let anything ever let you think or believe that God will stop loving you, or that the forgiveness that Jesus died to bring isn’t for you. Jesus calls us to be His disciples by staying close to Him and living our lives in God’s Word. Sometimes you’ll do that very well, other times you will do it very badly, often you’ll do it okay. You’re human. But the real message for you, and for each one of us, is that God’s love and commitment to each one of us as His children never changes. Out of all the learning we have done

together, that you have done up to this point, and that you will do for the rest of your lives, this is the most important thing. This is what gives you meaning and freedom in your lives. The truth of God's love is the truth which will truly set you free.

We do have many different versions of the truth around us nowadays, and some change all the time, but the truth of God's love is as meaningful and as life-changing for us today as it has always been. This is the truth Martin Luther spoke out for, and it's the truth which brings us freedom, forgiveness, guidance and a foundation for our lives today. Freedom to live our lives in and for God. Freedom from our sin and our guilt. Freedom to live each day as those whom God loves and cares for. Again, for all of you who are taking another step in your life of faith today, our prayer is that this is the truth which will always stand at the centre of your lives no matter what happens. And, for each one of us, may the truth of God's love also live in us each day, reminding us of His love and forgiveness, and calling us to live with and follow Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any truths which regularly change? Any truths which are unchanging? Any truths people hold on to which are really opinions? Any truths which are really important for us to know and accept?
- Why is the truth, in some cases, so important? Can you think of any other examples (not faith related) in which knowing and accepting the truth leads to freedom for us?
- 'The truth will set you free'. What do you believe Jesus means by that? What freedom does knowing and living in the truth of God's love bring for us? How have you experienced this in your life?

Pray: thank God for the many truths He gives us to live in each day. Ask for the Holy Spirit to give us faith to know the One truth which can set us truly free.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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