



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 30, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

1st Sunday of End Time; Reformation

Epistle Lesson: [Romans 3:19-28](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [John 8:31-36](#)

The Truth Will Set You Free

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior Jesus: Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

As Americans we like to see we're completely free and independent. Fierce American independence is one of our trademarks. We don't have to follow anyone and we're not slaves to anyone and all these kinds of things. We're a lot like what the Jews were that Jesus was talking to in the Gospel today. But in reality, many people in the world and in our country today live in kind of a prison of their own guilt. All the various studies I read about what people struggle with and how to help them usually lists, as one of the top things of the list, people struggling with guilt. Guilt over this or guilt over that, and people deal with it in all different ways. For some it's therapy. For some it's self-medication with alcohol or drugs or some other addiction. There are a lot of people in our country that are struggling with guilt. That's really nothing new because that's what Luther struggled with at the time of the Reformation.

Luther struggled with guilt. In fact, if you read his writings you will hear him say he had even grown to hate God because God demanded righteousness of him, which he understood to be holiness and perfection, because God had said, "**Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy**" ([Leviticus 19:2](#)) and "**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**" ([Matthew 5:48](#)) Luther knew all too well that he couldn't do it and wondered how God could demand a righteousness of him that he could not provide. He was taught by the church of his day that Jesus came and His grace, His life and death in our place gives us this spark. It gives people a spark so they can begin to offer God the righteousness He demands. Not that Jesus came to BE our righteousness. That's a bit different. So Luther found himself in this prison of guilt over not being righteous and seeing the word "righteousness" over and over in Scripture and getting irritated with God.

Luther was a doctor of theology, a professor at the university in Wittenberg and one of his assignments then was to teach the [Book of Romans](#). As he was teaching the [Book of Romans](#) and as he studied it more and more, he came to this realization. The Spirit opened his eyes to see that the righteousness God demands is the righteousness that God gives through the life and death of Christ. Christ's perfect life in our place and His death as the punishment for our sins is given to us as a gift so that God considers us righteous and we are righteous by faith alone, by God's grace alone. We can be absolutely certain of this because of Scripture alone. It gives us the source of truth. Not the teachings of people, but the Scriptures. That opened his eyes and that led to the Reformation and to a refocus on what the early church had—a focus on Jesus and what He had done for us.

We hear Jesus saying the same thing here. If you want to know the truth, **the truth will set you free**. Notice where He says you find the truth. Here's His promise: ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** Notice He says ***"the truth"*** and ***"the truth"*** is found in His teachings, which would be His Word. His teaching is all of the Bible—Old Testament, New Testament, the things He taught while He was here, the things He spoke through the Spirit before He came and after He left. That's His teaching. In there you find ***"the truth."***

Our society today is more obsessed with **truths**. "This might be **your truth**, it's **a truth**, but this is **my truth**, it's **a truth**." God doesn't leave any room for that. He says "If you're going to look for different truths, your own truth and not truth that is found in my teaching, you are still going to be a slave to sin." When we get caught up in our truths, we can really mess things up.

Two or three weeks ago I had an interesting encounter with someone else's truth. You all remember the pandemic, when you couldn't come to church and when I stood up here and preached and you watched through screens? What I was preaching to, if you remember, were five cutouts of John Cena. The first time he was here was on Palm Sunday and we even taped palm branches to his hands. The kids sent them. I thought it was kind of nice. They wanted to put a smile on their dad's face while the world was collapsing around us. So those Cenas were here. They were up in the balcony for a while. They were in the rooms. They were in the basement. I finally took them home. There was one that I put in my front window above the funeral home (where I live).

John Cena—you know John Cena, a wrestler. He's kind of a big guy. He was wearing a red shirt that says "Hustle, Loyalty and Respect," one of his shirts, one of his phrases, one of the things he always does. I had a member tell me that every time they walked by and saw that it put a smile on their face, so I left it there because I thought that was kind of neat. I was driving and I got a call from my landlord, who owns Ryan Funeral Home

and Nickel Funeral Home, and I'm thinking, "Who died?" That's the first thought that came to my mind. Instead, Scott says to me "Pastor, I have to ask you a question. A woman was driving by in Morrison and she called me up and said 'Why in the world do you have a statue of Joe Biden in the funeral home saying "Vote Biden"?' " It was just in one little corner of the window, so I'm assuming this person just caught it with a glimpse and didn't really see it because I don't know how you mistake John Cena for Joe Biden. And as far as I know, Joe Biden isn't running for anything, is he? Vote Joe Biden—that's what she said the sign said.

I'll love you no matter who you vote for. I don't care who you vote for. This isn't a political thing. But what it is saying is we often construct our own truths, don't we? This person's truth was that there was a statue of Joe Biden saying "Vote Biden." They didn't stop and look and find out if that is actually what it was. They just went with their truth and called up someone because evidently they were just in a hurry to be offended by something. It didn't matter if it was real or not, that was their truth.

I find that incredibly sad because sometimes even we, as Christians, let the devil get into our head with a truth, our own truth, that we replace the Word of God with. "God isn't really that upset if I commit this sin because God is a God of love and He wants me to be happy. He knows this makes me happy." "I don't really need to spend time with God in the Word or receive the Sacrament because God knows I've got other things to do." Even though Jesus, who inspired the Scriptures, it was His custom to go to the synagogue every Saturday to hear the Word read by someone else; even though He has a part of writing it, He found benefit in it. For many Christians today, their truth is "I don't really need that. I know a little better than Jesus."

There is **the truth**. It's found in Scripture. In Scripture God is very clear. He lays bare our sins and shows us what they are and what they deserve. They deserve an eternity in hell—no ifs, ands or buts. But the truth that He lays out for us in Scripture isn't that God overlooks sin and God doesn't care about sin. It's that God hates sin so much that He sent His own Son to live in our place and die in our place so that we would be declared not guilty and that, through faith, we would become His children and be able to spend eternity with Him in heaven. This is **the truth!** People can ignore it. People can neglect it. It doesn't change that it's **the truth** and it's the **only truth** that will set us free for eternity!

I'm not mad at people that don't know that truth. I'm not even mad at the people that had that truth and set it to the side. But it saddens me. It reminds me, as God's people who have been set free, "***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,***" that He has set us free for service, for living for Him to thank Him for heaven, and for living for others; not for ourselves. We haven't been set free so that we can say it's all about us.

We've been set free to love others as Christ loved us. That means we love others by sharing this truth, lovingly, kindly, gently, but passionately because it's the only truth that sets us free. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7.\)](#) Amen.