

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

October 27, 2024 (Reformation Sunday, Proper 25, Year B)
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Mark 10:46-50

Reformation Sunday is all about freedom. It's all over the readings for today. I mean, look at Bartimaeus – he WON'T SHUT UP. Even though people TELL him to.

And that's hard to hear because WE are so QUICK to fall into silence, worried about offending someone, or hurting another's feelings, or being rejected, or whatever. And so, when folks tell us to shut up, we're ALL TOO QUICK to oblige.

The crowd TRIES to SHUSH Bartimaeus. They think Jesus is too busy and too important to be bothered with the likes of this poor, wretched, blind beggar. But Bartimaeus will NOT be denied. He will NOT be shushed. No! He cries out more desperately, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Bartimaeus WON'T BE silenced. He is free. Free to defy his neighbors. Free to call for help. Free to TELL Jesus his needs. Free.

Maybe he's suffered enough, or feels like there's nothing left to lose, or just DOESN'T CARE anymore. Or maybe he just senses — or, really, SEES — that in the presence of Jesus all the rules CHANGE, and he is no longer JUST "Blind Bartimaeus" but instead "Bartimaeus, Child of God." Whatever the reason, he KNOWS he is free, and acts with such FAITH and COURAGE that Jesus stops, and turns around, and HEARS his cries.

It's about freedom.

The crowd that tried to quiet the boisterous blind Bartimaeus was evidently embarrassed by his loud, direct calls for help. There were established CHANNELS to ask the Lord for healing or forgiveness – why didn't Bartimaeus OBEY them? The crowd, like so many of us, preferred to put its trust in the RULES, in the PROCESS, instead of in the LORD. But Jesus never said, "You must be born of the PROCESS." He said, "You must be born of the Spirit." The PROCESS, the RULES carve DEEP RUTS into our lives, but in the presence of our Lord we are moved to BREAK OUT of those ruts and FOLLOW HIM, WHEREVER the Spirit may lead.

It's about freedom.

It's in Jeremiah 31 too. The PAST TRAPS us. The past reminds us of all our shortcomings and failures and disappointments. And God tells Israel THROUGH JEREMIAH that even though Israel FORGOT their identity and fell SHORT in a HUNDRED different ways, God would NOT hold this against them. That God WILL – and ALREADY HAS – INTENTIONALLY FORGOTTEN all their sin. And here's the thing – since there's no MEMORY of your mistakes and shortcomings, no memory of your SIN, the future is wide open. You're free.

It's about freedom.

The whole Reformation, while we're at it – from Paul's declaration that we have all been justified by GRACE, to Luther's hammering his theses to the Wittenburg Church door; to remind us that GRACE REIGNS. The whole Reformation-THING was intended to tell us that, in the end, we don't need to DO ANYTHING – EARN anything, SAY anything, ACCOMPLISH anything, or BUY anything to EARN God's love. The Reformation told us that we already HAVE God's love, and that most of the Church's PROBLEMS – and, indeed, the WORLD'S problems – start when we FORGET that we already HAVE love and worth and dignity, as a GIFT from God, and instead try to EARN it, or TAKE it from someone else.

In the last few chapters of this Gospel of Mark, we've been talking about the IDOLS we TRUST INSTEAD of God. Things like success and power, security and control. They're just ILLUSIONS that EVAPORATE when tested, TOWERS that CRUMBLE when leaned on. They make promises they can't keep. We try to build walls to make ourselves feel safe, but we can't CONTROL LIFE, and there's NO SECURITY when our demons are INSIDE those walls WITH us. There is only ONE strong

tower, only one NAME by which we are saved. His name is Jesus, and HE makes us free. Free to live generously, free to take risks, free to TRULY LIVE.

It's about freedom.

Sometimes we might wonder what the Bible has to DO with our lives TODAY, and if the words and deeds of the Reformers 500 YEARS AGO MATTER, but it's REALLY all about FREEDOM. We are NOT TRAPPED. No matter what we have DONE, no matter what has been done TO us, those things may DESCRIBE us, but they do NOT DEFINE us. They don't CAPTURE WHO we are. Only ONE thing can do THAT: God, the creator and sustainer of all. And God has CHOSEN to CALL us BELOVED CHILDREN, HOLY AND PRECIOUS in God's sight. THAT'S what DEFINES us.

And so we are free. Free to risk, and serve, and help, and care, and try, and struggle, and laugh, and all the rest. We are FREE. Free to LOVE, just as GOD LOVES US.

Affirmands, YOU TOO are FREE. Today, you stand before us, and claim this faith as your own – this is what you believe for YOURSELF now. Today, you become an ADULT MEMBER of the church. You now have all the rights and responsibilities of a full member of this congregation. You may continue to be DRAGGED to church by your PARENTS for a few more years, but you are FREE to CHOOSE for YOURSELF what you will DO with your faith. Will you tuck it away as just ANOTHER EXPERIENCE you'll REMEMBER FONDLY, or will you LIVE your faith ACTIVELY AND DEFIANTLY, like Bartimaeus, and Luther and the Reformers, and the COUNTLESS GENERATIONS that have PASSED that faith on to YOU. THAT choice is YOURS now.

It's ALL about FREEDOM. What will YOU choose? Amen.