



“If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” St. John 8:31b-32. Part of this passage is perhaps one of the more quoted verses of Scripture. The words “the truth will set you free” are often set apart from the entire thought expressed by Jesus in this passage. These words are used as a motto by some, printed on letterheads, buildings on college campuses and in other various ways. The fact that Jesus expressed these words and the theological truth given in them is often left out. Yet, we still have God's Word and those who believe trust in the truth of that Word as it is still faithfully proclaimed.

Our Lord spoke to believers while unbelievers were there listening as well. The faith of new believers, who were listening to Jesus, certainly needed to be strengthened. Sadly, many had already given in to the weakness of their faith and left Jesus **“and no longer walked with Him” (St. John 6:66).** In speaking to those who were listening, Jesus told them to hold to His teaching.

We in the church today continue to hold to His teaching. We have the Word of God, the teaching of Jesus to this very day by God's grace, mercy and provision. God's Word continues to lead and guide us in our work in His Kingdom and our daily lives. The marks of the church include faithful adherence to the Word, administration of the Sacraments according to Christ's institution and proclamation of the Gospel. The marks of believers are that we remain faithful to God's Word in all of its truth and purity. We learn the truth from God's Word and the truth makes us free.

What we learn from the Word, from Jesus is that God sent Him to save us from the condemnation of our sin. We learn that in Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins and with that forgiveness there is life and salvation by God's pure grace. We learn that Jesus is the “way and the truth and the life” and that He is the only way to the Father, the only source of salvation. This truth is given to us by grace in Christ, that sets us free from the curse of sin, free from death and free for eternal life.

The disciples who followed Jesus during His ministry on this earth were reminded by Jesus they needed to remain with Him. They were to hold to His teaching. Jesus demonstrated the power to still storms. He fed hungry people and He healed many diseases, afflictions, and illnesses. All of these things drew attention to Himself as the Savior and attracted many people to have an interest and desire to learn more about Him. In making people His disciples, we see that it was through His teaching, God's Word, that He taught them about Himself as Savior. We might ask “how did He hold them as His disciples?” The answer is through His Sacred Word. Jesus teaches that to be a disciple (follower) of Jesus is to believe His entire teaching and remain faithful to it.

Only the teaching of Jesus sets you free. Satan's grip is broken through the work of Christ Jesus, our Savior. Therefore, we as believers are made free in Christ to serve our Lord with a pure heart. Religions of law continue to burden people with the belief that through personal fulfillment of the law we can obtain favor with God. Jesus also says in **St. John 8:36 “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** Through Holy Baptism God brings you into His kingdom, being made free through the Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior who frees you from condemnation, from death and the devil to be free to serve the Lord having been given the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore, we are not only made free to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest God's Word, but also to live it, believe and trust in it by God's grace even though we are often weak and stumble and fall. Martin Luther speaks in one of his devotions about people who have been taught the message and think they know everything about it. When trouble comes they desperately need to hear the message again, being taught once again as though still a child. God in His mercy continues to provide us with His Word, the truth that sets us free. In Christ, we have the truth that sets us free and are given that saving message continually that we would continue walking by the grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The hymn writer reminds us of the truth which makes us free in Christ as we ask our Lord to keep us true to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Stay with us, Lord, and keep us true;
Preserve our faith our whole life through-
Your Word alone our heart's defense,
The Church's glorious confidence.

LSB 585 “Lord Jesus Christ, With Us Abide” stanza 6