

2015 ELCSA-SED DIOCESAN RALLY SERMON IN VRYHEID (Hymn 203)

Vs: 5-6: “Abayizazi zezwe bahlala noJesu bamazi ngemibhalo abamfuni nokho. Babona izindaba zonke, ezikaJesu, qha! Ubuhlakani babo bungubuwula nje. Nansi inhliziyi yami, Jesu mawuyenze kusihlwa nakusasa lthempeli lakho; Ngingabe ngisathanda Ukwazi kwabezwe. **Ngibe nobuhlakani Bokwazi wena nje.**”

John 8:31 – 36: UJesu kuphela/Christ Alone/Solus Christus OR Solo Christo!

The **five solas or solae** of the Protestant Reformation offered a strong corrective to the faulty practices and beliefs of the time, and they remain relevant today.

Solus Christus/Christ alone is one of the **five solae** that summarize the **Protestant Reformers'** basic belief that **salvation** is through **Christ** alone and that Christ is the only mediator between God and man. *Solo Christo* (sometimes listed as *Solus Christus*, “through Christ alone”) emphasizes the role of Jesus in salvation.

All of this speaks of Christ's *mediatorial* role. Jesus Christ serves as the only mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). We cannot earn our way into heaven, only Christ can. We cannot stand before God “naked and unclothed,” but only when clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Christ serves as the mediator making reconciliation between a holy God and sinful man.

While Reformation Day, by definition, includes an element of looking into history, back to Luther's deed of 1517 and all the streams that converged to bring about the Protestant Reformations, I would like us to focus more **on the present and future by considering our own need for renewal and reformation.**

Verse 30: “*Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.*” Now it is obvious that some of those many who put their faith in him were Jews, that's why in verse 31 it says: “*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to the teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know Me, and I will set you free.’*”

In this Gospel, “**truth**” does not refer to a **philosophical ideal** or the opposite of **falsehood**; ***it is knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus' own self.*** Knowing this “**truth**” is **knowing God, God made present in Jesus**, who is “the way, and the **truth**, and the life” (14:6). Jesus makes this clear in 8:36, when he substitutes “**the Son**” for “**the truth**,” saying that ***the Son makes people free.*** “As “**Son**” and “**truth**,” **Jesus himself is the very revelation of God** (1:18; 5:19-27; 14:8-10).

Jesus does not expect his hearers to grasp the fullness of his claim all at once or to assess its validity through logic or research. They will come to know him as “**the truth**” ***if they live with him and remain connected to him and his word.*** **Experience, not** deduction, is the key.

Jesus' first comment, in **8:31-32**, oozes with promise. Three things follow from the initial “**if**,” which he speaks to **people who had already expressed belief in him: If you continue** in my word, [then]:

- you are truly my **disciples**
- you will know the **truth/You will know me and**
- the truth will make you **free/I will make you free**

John says that **remaining connected to** or “**dwelling in**” him and his message is **the true measure** of discipleship. **It is the path to truth and freedom.** Talk of “dwelling” fills John; see especially 15:1-17. “***We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?***” It is true indeed; no one likes to be a slave. But sometimes we become slaves without noticing we are already slaves. A **slave** is a person who is the property of another and is **under the control of the master**; a person who is **overly influenced by something or someone else**. Very few if any, do volunteer to be slaves. You can either be a slave of the evil one, used by the evil one or you can be a slave for the good, used by the good one. **Who is your master? Are you not a puppet of someone?**

On verse 34 Jesus replied, “***I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.***” I hope there is a reason to say a slave **to** sin not a slave **of** sin. “**Bonke abenza isono bangamakheboka esono.**” Jesus answered them, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.**”

If you plan evil for other people you are indeed the child of the devil. No children of God can have sleepless nights holding meetings that are aimed at the down-fall of God's children. In Verse 37, Jesus says: **"I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word."** Day in and day out Jesus was brushing shoulders with his very murderers. Jesus was always aware of who were his killers; now and again he would confront them face to face. The worse enemies of the Church are not those outside the Church but are those who say they believe in Jesus; those who say they truly love the church; It is those who say are called to Holy Ministry; those we even employ or elect to serve the Church in various levels and structures of our church. The betrayer of Jesus was from the inner circle not from the periphery! The devil himself was not just a minor Angel.

Only in this passage does "freedom" language appear in John. Jesus' mention of freedom offends his hearers, who insist they have always enjoyed freedom (even though, ironically, Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries live under Roman rule). But Jesus contends that without him they live as slaves. First, they are enslaved to sin, living as oppressed people. Second, this slavery relegates them to inferior status; because of it they cannot claim a permanent place or identity in God's family. Jesus then shifts his household metaphor to suggest that, as "Son," only he can ensure true freedom and secure membership in God's family.

To say Jesus brings freedom implies that people live in slavery, and we do not like to hear that we are enslaved in any way. So much of our modern lives try to reassure us that we are, or should be, free from any constraints. We perpetuate myths that we are at the mercy of no forces that we cannot control. These are not necessarily the same thing as "sin," but they point up ways in which we resist God and really need a liberator.

- Interpreters puzzle over the "they" in 8:33, and why it seems that the people "who had believed" in Jesus (8:31) resist him and eventually are told by him in 8:47 that they are not really "from God." First, this underscores Jesus' insistence that **true liberation comes from dwelling with him**, not from just believing or assenting. Jesus speaks to people who are apparent insiders, people drawn to Jesus, people who believed, not to an easily ostracized "other." Even "believers" today resist discipleship and Jesus' gift of unqualified freedom.
- The point is not just that **Christ alone**--to the exclusion of **all others**--brings true freedom from sin and true belonging in God's household. It is also that **Christ *himself* does it**. Jesus does not announce new dogma or new confessions to which one must subscribe. **He demands an encounter with himself**. One must dwell with him and with his word. Our right standing before God is through the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ, the *only* mediator between God and man. It is in Christ alone that we stand justified before a holy God.
- To take seriously Jesus' claims about setting us free is to take seriously the proposition that **we are all enslaved to powers beyond our ability to master**. Reformation Day offers a suitable occasion for considering the ways in which we often find ourselves enslaved to particular religious identities, heritages, and practices, all the while pretending that dwelling in those things is the same as dwelling in Jesus and his word.

No institution nor constitution or councils and committees should enslave you! Be only a slave of Christ! Christ Alone is the Liberator!

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!

JESUS IS THE TRUTH HE WILL SET YOU FREE!

CHRIST ALONE IS THE LIBERATOR!