

If you continue in my word, you will be my disciples, and You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

As Americans, the idea of freedom has a lot of historical significance.

- We think of the Declaration of independence from the tyrannical English rule of King George.
- We think of the Constitution and things such as
 - freedom of speech,
 - freedom to bear arms,
 - and freedom to worship without interference from the government.
- We sometimes push the envelope to think of freedom as the ability to do whatever we darn well please.

But such an idea goes far beyond what our forebears fought for.

Once the revolutionary war was won and our ties with England severed, it was not every man to himself – or woman to herself.

No!

The leaders immediately set about crafting appropriate limits to individual freedom for the sake of the common good.

The Articles of Confederation were drafted,

courts of law were established,

and eventually, the Constitution came into being.

So even considered in light of our nation's history,

freedom does not exist for its own sake,

but for the sake of society – for the sake of civilization
– for the sake of preserving human life.

Even more important for us is to consider what Jesus means when he uses the term freedom.

For Jesus – and by extension, for us in the church

– freedom is inseparable from the Word of God.

Freedom is deliverance from the tyranny of sin and all that Satan does to mess up our lives.

Freedom, as Jesus means it, is being able to thumb our nose at the devil in all his forms

not because we are able to perfectly withstand temptation (though we try to),

not because we never sin or get caught in the devil's snares (we certainly do!)

We can thumb our nose at the devil because we know that Jesus

–the Son – has done what it takes

so that nothing the devil does

can separate us from the family of God.

He has given his life on the cross in exchange for our life

– and then rose from the dead to destroy Satan forever.

So long as we continue as people who are shaped and guided by that truth

– *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly*

– we are free to live the life God desires for us

without worrying about whether or not we qualify.

If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed, Jesus the Son of the Father says.

But what about our life now, as we await the final reckoning but still must contend with the wiles of Satan and our own weakness?

What do we do when we are swept up in the forces of evil that we are powerless to control?

When the brokenness of creation becomes the brokenness of our health?

When Satan assaults our mind and spirit with notions that we must work harder, be better to control our destiny?

When we are surrounded by claims that the Bible is false,

that Jesus was not God,

and that there is no God beyond ourselves, no life beyond this one?

Here the Psalms are a comforting reminder: *The Lord is my refuge and strength – a very present help in trouble.*

Continuing in the Word of God is to seek refuge in Him from the onslaught of life's trials and temptations.

To hold onto what God has said and done

to show his enduring love for us and for all people.

Psalm 46 got me thinking about refuge

– that we are all refugees from the deadly domination of sin
and the brokenness of this world.

But we must remember that being refugees is no easy existence.

It is putting one foot in front of the other

trusting God to provide what we cannot provide for ourselves.

It is remembering what Jesus told us to do.

...

It was the clash between the lies of Satan and the truth of the Gospel that led Martin Luther to preach and teach

that forgiveness, life and salvation

- come by grace alone,
- through faith alone,
- in Christ alone,
- whom we know from Scripture alone.

We cannot tell ourselves that it doesn't matter if we don't pay attention to the Scriptures

and then complain when we do not perceive God's loving presence in our lives.

We do not perceive him because we have not continued in his Word of life.

We have turned a deaf ear to God

and a blind eye to the deeds of love and mercy

he has shown us in Jesus.

So we lose our way to the refuge God provides and suffer the pain of our own sin.

...

But this is not what God desires for us!

No – Jesus comes to open our deaf ears and our blind eyes

to see him and him alone as the source of all good

– all because he is risen from the dead, putting an end to Satan's misery.

So today is the day of your deliverance!

Now is the time to turn back to the Lord

– to reconnect with his Word of life and grace for us

– to be freed by the Son who gave all for us.

Today we are set free by the body and blood of our Lord,

Free to vote for imperfect candidates **because we know that whatever they do or don't do cannot hurt our relationship with God.**

We are set free to be generous toward the work of building up the kingdom of God **because we know that God has given us everything we need.**

We are free to live in joy **because we know that in Holy Baptism, Jesus has included us in the family of God and included us in his inheritance.**

We are free to be calm and carry on in the face of the stresses of this life **because we know they don't have the last word.**

Commit yourselves to take time daily to continue in God's Word so that you don't forget what great salvation you have received from Jesus today.

And remember to share the good news with others, so that they, too, might have life and have it abundantly.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen