

JOHN 8:31-36

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ **The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.** ³⁶ **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

This morning, we hear our Lord speaking of those who are "in the house."

The problem is, of course, there are two different ways to be in the house. One, the way of the servant. The other, the way of the child—the son or the daughter.

Both are in the house, the servant and the son. But one is there provisionally—it's contingent on how long you can be of service. That's the slave. The other is there permanently, by virtue of being in the family. That, of course is the son. John 8:35:

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.

Jesus places you in the house. No contingency upon your ability to serve, but really *in the house*—permanently, never to be moved, as son or daughter.

You are in the house, in it forever by virtue of Jesus clothing you in his righteousness in Baptism. You're there in such a way that for you to be excluded would be for Jesus to be excluded, for you bear his Name.

To be "in the house" is to be in the care of the Father of the household, living every day in the certainty that you are not your own, but you belong to him, and everything he does is for your benefit.

The Son makes you free. That's life under the Gospel—life as gift of Jesus, and his giving of gifts is unshakable.

So you can no more go up to one who has been baptized by Jesus and tell them they don't belong in the house than you could, in our world, go up to a child down the street and tell them they don't belong in their own family.

It is a matter of birthright. No birthright is earned. You are in the house by Baptism's birthright. Or else, the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit put on you in Baptism would be meaningless.

But here we find the danger. For while being a member of the house gives you the full rights and honor of the family name, there *is* that other way of being in the house.

It's to be in the house according to our flesh.

So this is the danger: to be in the house not as a family member, but as a hireling with no share of the family birthright.

Jesus names you as a full family member, naming us his brothers and sisters by adoption. It's pure gift, pure grace—a Lord who so wants to be our brother that he took on our own flesh, then took on our own sin, and redeemed us with his own blood.

But our sinful flesh exerts itself—we want to be in the house because we earn it. Romans 3:19:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

We want to be under the Law. This sounds strange. But it is the reality of our life of the sinful flesh. On the one hand, we are in rebellion against God's Law, that's our sin. On the other hand, we want to use God's Law so that by following it we can justify ourselves—and this self-justification is our greater sin.

"By works of the Law," Paul says, "no flesh is justified in God's sight, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." So, our problem with the Law is, first, it accuses us before God. Then, we try to rescue ourselves by doing works of the Law. But that's worse, for no flesh is justified by the Law.

So we are in the house, placed there by Jesus as his brothers and sisters—his grace, his gift. At the same time, in our sinful flesh, we want to prove our worthiness to be in the house by our keeping of the Law. We find ourselves, then, at that point, living in the house not as free persons belonging to the family Name, but as hirelings, those having placed themselves under the Law's slavery.

The church, until Jesus comes again, will always live in this problem.

In the church's early generations, some teachers even had people changing their diet in order to live cleaner lives as Christians, as if cutting out this food or that food somehow cleansed you. Some would even pledge themselves to never get married, as if rejecting God's institution of the marriage of man and woman and living in a monastery could give you a more pure life.

Sometimes, people would be so far under the Law they would set up rules for how many prayers you must say, for what you must do in life, for how much money you must fork over—there will never be any shortage of rules or methods or systems a teacher can invent in order to keep a Christian under control.

This is the Day of the Reformation of the Church. We hear the Gospel which frees from the Law, of the righteousness given purely as gift, and of living in the house not as slave, but as full member of the family.

The church is always being reformed. As long as we live in our sinful flesh, as long as we are tempted to return to the Law as the way to justify ourselves before God, as long as we try to control fellow Christians by the Law, as long as the church is preaching anything other than Christ crucified for the justification of the sinner, the church will always be being reformed.

How is the Church continually reformed? The Gospel—*that* is the Word reforming the church and cleansing to the sinner.

What is the ongoing reformation of the church? It is simply to hear this Gospel:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no person will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

[Romans 3]

Our Lord brings this reformation to us every day, as long as we live in our sinful flesh. Jesus places you alongside himself in his household. He frees with his word of forgiveness. By this Word we live our life of faith, living as free persons before God by the Gospel, members of his household. John 8:36:

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

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