

‘Tis the season...

for the politicians to talk to us about health care reform!

The REAL TRUTH, they say, about President Obama’s Plan
is that it will bankrupt our country.

The REAL TRUTH, they say, about the Republicans, is that they only
want to oppose a Democratic plan, and have none of their own.

The REAL TRUTH, they say, about the insurance companies is that
they will use this whole situation to get more leverage.

Sorry to say it, but many of us have become convinced that the first victim
in these political battles is the TRUTH ITSELF!

Is TRUTH discoverable here in “spin city” -

political truth,

scientific truth,

philosophical truth,

moral and spiritual truth?

Or are we left with saying

what is said with increasing frequency to our children at school:

‘TRUE’ IS WHAT’S TRUE FOR YOU!

which is to say that, in the end, there is no such thing as the absolute truth.

In the midst of all this fog and darkness

there rings out on this Reformation Sunday, a message that pierces the fog
like a lovely BELL ringing...

THERE IS TRUTH TO BE HEARD!

There is a message you can believe, on which you may stand.

A message entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus Himself,

a message posted with hammer blows on a church door in Germany
in October, 1517.

On this Reformation Sunday I speak it to you.

And how will you know that it IS the truth? Here is the test:
IT WILL MAKE YOU FREE!

Listen to the words of Jesus:

Read the Text

In this message about the truth,
there are **THREE GREAT TRUTHS** we need to hear.

The **FIRST**
is the very hard truth that we human beings are **ENSLAVED TO SIN**.

We are **SINNERS**.
Guilty before God. Responsible for our behavior.

Jesus pulled no punches. He did not say,
“You have some personality disorders... you make some poor choices...”

NO. “You are **SLAVES TO SIN**.” That’s what He said.

They didn’t want to hear it. It made them angry.
But it was **THE TRUTH!**

Martin Luther said the same thing to the church of his day.
He didn’t pussy-foot around. He didn’t walk on eggs.
He said it boldly – even **BRUTALLY!**

He said it in his 95 Theses, posted on the church door in Wittenberg.

He said it at great length in a booklet entitled
The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

They didn’t want to hear it. It made them angry.
Angry enough to call Luther a “wild boar in the vineyard,”
an “outlaw,” a “heretic.”
But it was the truth!

In America we have a hard time with this one too.
What the Jews said to Jesus, we say of ourselves, “We have never
been enslaved to anyone. We are
THE LAND OF THE FREE, THE HOME OF THE BRAVE.

But the REAL TRUTH is that, increasingly, this is
the land of the VIOLENT and the ADDICTED,
the home of the PERVERTED and the SELFISH,

who want to blame everyone else for their troubles.

It is a truth that HURTS, most of all when it comes home in a PERSONAL WAY.

I heard that truth years ago when I was in college in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.
There one afternoon, my roommate sat me down and told me
something I had never faced until that moment. He said,
“I want a different roommate. I can’t go on rooming with you.
You are the most ARROGANT PERSON I have ever met!”

It hurt me deeply. I didn’t want to hear it.
BUT IT WAS THE TRUTH!

Have you heard the truth about yourself?

That even though you may think you are a kindly soul, an upstanding citizen,
a solid, dependable church member,
You have serious faults and flaws...

YOU ARE A SINNER...and those sins have power to enslave you!

It’s the TRUTH.

And because it is true, all of us have a desperate NEED for some REMEDY,
some help against SIN.

So we listen carefully as Jesus begins to talk about a TRUTH that will
“make you free”.

We agree in our own way. Yes, we need “truth.”

But to most of us Americans, “TRUTH” equals “EDUCATION.”

Education means exposure to new ideas –

a glorious freedom of information that will lead to freedom of choice,
that will lead to lasting freedom, RIGHT?

Do we have a drug problem?

Then let’s EDUCATE. Teach them the facts about alcohol, nicotine,
marijuana, cocaine, and all the rest. They’ll just say “NO”!

Do we have a problem with SEX? Too many out-of-wedlock babies?

A rash of STDs?

Then let's EDUCATE! Tell them the facts of life.
Show them how to use a condom.

Whatever the problem, someone has a plan for EDUCATING PEOPLE against it. Provide the facts, and people (who are basically GOOD) will know the right thing and do it! RIGHT?

Now it ought to be said that the church is not opposed to EDUCATION – whether in public or private schools, or by other agencies.

But we must say,

THERE ARE SOME TRUTHS THAT DO NOT SET PEOPLE FREE!

What has happened most often as a result of our massive education efforts is that we have gone

from a nation of IGNORANT SINNERS
to a nation of WELL-EDUCATED SINNERS.

Knowledgeable, but still trapped!

I heard a story about a British hunter in Africa decades ago.

He had set out to catch some animals by a game trail.

He had hidden some rope nooses at different points, and each was connected to a bent tree branch that was set to spring up when tripped.

One day the hunter accidentally stepped in one of his own nooses.

UP HE WENT! ...and with no knife, he was helpless to get down, and there he dangled.

There were certain truths which, at that moment, could NOT set the hunter free.

One was the truth of his PEDIGREE.

He had come from a line of famous hunters. But right now, that didn't help!
A SECOND was his great store of JUNGLE FACTS – about the various animal species, their sounds they made, and their eating habits.
But just now, none if it did him any good at all.

The Jews in Jesus' day, like that hunter, were trapped in their sins.

They claimed a PEDIGREE – that they were “children of Abraham” – but it did them no good.

Isn't it the same for us?

Though denominational loyalty isn't what it used to be,
we LUTHERANS still tend to be proud of our PEDIGREE.

We know we are an "educated" church, with a store of useful FACTS
at our fingertips...

maybe you know something about Martin Luther and
Philip Melanchthon and C. F. W. Walther.
some of you can still recite parts of the Small Catechism from memory.

But those truths won't set anybody free.

Many who know all those things and much more
still live bitter, joyless lives
still persist in disobedience to God
still stay hostile and estranged from people around them.

Back to that poor hunter.

What he really needs right now is someone to come and cut him down!

And that is the SECOND GREAT TRUTH in this text from John 8.
THERE IS SOMEONE WHO CAN DO THAT FOR US.

He is Jesus, the Savior,
and He is the TRUTH that sets us free from our slavery to sin.

He said it explicitly: **"I am the way, the TRUTH, the life.
No one comes to the Father but by me."**

He was TRUTH wrapped in FLESH.
The love of God incarnated as a human being.

His very first sermon at Nazareth one Sabbath morning set out His simple platform:
**"The Spirit of the Lord...has sent me
to proclaim RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES"** (Luke 4)

He came not only to preach freedom, but to BRING IT.
The Gospels are the record of how He set at liberty one after another
with His joyful song: **"Be of good cheer – your sins are forgiven!"**

Jesus brings FREEDOM. That's the TRUTH.

Someone has written that Jesus was
THE FREEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED,
AND YET THE MOST WILLING SERVANT.

The last act of that servant life was the greatest service of all,
yet still freely done...

“No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord.”

That’s the TRUTH.

A truth you can stand on personally, because He did it for you.

Do you KNOW this truth? Believe it? Live by it?

Living by it means becoming like Christ Himself.

Martin Luther explained it in a memorable pair of statements:

THE CHRISTIAN IS A PERFECTLY FREE LORD, SUBJECT TO NONE.
THE CHRISTIAN IS A PERFECTLY DUTIFUL SERVANT, SUBJECT
TO ALL.

Freed from sin. Freed to serve.

Do you want to stay that way?

Then hear the THIRD great truth:

IF YOU WANT TO STAY FREE, CONTINUE HEARING THAT WORD
ABOUT JESUS CHRIST.

“Continue in my Word,” said Jesus.

For nothing in this world stays the same by itself.

A marriage that began joyfully may end sadly.

A church that was on fire for the Lord may grow cold.

A business, a team, or a nation will fall from its position of leadership
unless it continues doing what made it strong to start with.

A while back I spoke with the father of a large family.

His children were grown, and he was lamenting that not a single one of
his kids had stayed faithful to the church.

When I pointed out that he himself had gotten disconnected,
he tried to reassure me that things were fine. “I still believe,” he said.

“Ah, for how much longer?” I wondered.

The church is always ONE GENERATION AWAY FROM EXTINCTION.
So it must always be reformed, renewed.

This is how, said Jesus:

“Continue in my Word.”

Stay connected! Keep on listening! Put it into daily practice.

“The true treasure of the church,” says one of the 95 Theses, “is the Gospel!”

That’s a treasure NOT to be squirreled away in a church archive,
nor locked in the attic of your mind, an old, dusty relic of
happier times...

It’s a living thing to be heard again and again,
spoken and sung and shared and practiced daily,
as faithfully as we eat
as regularly as we breathe!

It can happen, my friend.

You can STAY WITH HIM, because that’s what He promised to do –
to stay with you “always, to the end of the world.”

THAT’S THE TRUTH.

Let it set you free!

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus.