

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

Sermon October 27th, 2019

Jesus Sets Us Free

Have you ever struggled to follow a law? For example, you have trouble waking the children up. Finally, after minutes of hard work they are awake. You scramble to get them ready for church. After a few challenging moments you are at the door ready to get their jackets and shoes on. One child is running away from you as you try to get their jacket on. Another one of your children thinks this is the perfect time for a good old game of hide and seek. You just realize they have not had anything to eat. So, you run to the kitchen and pack some snacks. Your partner has been waiting by the door all this time with their shoes on saying “are you ready yet?” Of course, it is two minutes till ten. You live about fifteen minutes away. “Don’t panic,” you say to yourself. “I can cut this down to at least seven minutes.” You check that everyone is buckled up and then stomp on the gas. The speedometer rising and rising to about 90 in a 60 zone. You look over at your spouse and see them gripping the dash for dear life. Of course, you hit every light on the way. So, really, you only save about two minutes. That was if the police car wasn’t hiding behind that building.

The rules of the road are often for many of us the legalistic laws we are more comfortable with bending or breaking in our society if need be. Sometimes, we are not even intentional about breaking these laws. A lapse in focus is all one needs to accidentally run a stop sign or red light or follow to close behind someone. For all of us here who drive I think it would shock us if someone stood up and said that they have followed every rule through out their lives when driving. It isn’t easy to follow the many laws that we are expected to follow on these Calgary roads.

Have you ever struggled with following the Ten Commandments? Martin Luther used to say that all we need to do is look at the First commandment and see how hard it is for us to follow this commandment to know that we need to depend on God’s grace to set us free. We want to put God first in our lives. We want to make time for devotion to God every day, whether it is through prayer or a spiritual reading or exercise. We want to come to worship every Sunday. We want to read our bibles daily. We want to imitate Christ in our lives, loving others as Christ loves us. But, sometimes work, or our hobbies, or our loved ones need a lot of our time and energy. Sometimes, disagreements, conflicts, misunderstandings make it more difficult for us to love one another. We sometimes find ourselves struggling to make time to nurture our

relationship with God. To live our lives with God at the centre. Following the many rules in our faith tradition isn't easy?

Have you ever tried to stop doing something? For example, you struggle with an addiction, and after immense pressure from your loved ones, decide to try and quit. You put in a good effort, but often find yourself being drawn back in. That Big Mac was just too enticing. If my team would have just played better I wouldn't have been tempted to swear in the first place. I am just so overwhelmed with stress. I just need one to get me through. Or maybe I can try quitting again when things are more relaxed. Whenever that will be. It isn't easy to follow all the rules and laws that are out there? It is sometimes too easy for sin to grab hold of us, and drag us back down.

In fact, if we were to sit down and type every law and rule we are supposed to follow we would have created a multitude of books. When Jesus says that we are slaves to sin we get it. Especially when we see that no matter how hard we try to follow these laws, we still end up bending or breaking some of them.

When Paul is confronted by some people in the churches in Rome who think that they are following all the laws in scripture. I like how Paul responds. The Law is like a mirror. Meaning that when we try to follow the law so zealously we end up realizing just how hard it is to follow the laws or to even interpret the laws, and we end up bending or breaking them. We start to see our real selves. Human beings that are imperfect. Who need to depend on God's grace to live the life God wants for us.

Paul himself thought he was living the law to perfection when he was persecuting Christians. It wasn't until Jesus blinded him that he saw that he was breaking the very laws he thought he was following and protecting. Paul had interpreted the laws differently than what Jesus and Jesus' early followers had interpreted them to be.

It isn't easy to follow the law, day in and day out. And yet, at times, people in our faith have taught us that living the law day in and day out is what is needed to be accepted as one of God's people.

The reason Jesus and Paul confront their followers on this issue of being accepted by God through the law is that they are facing people who have come to believe that they are living righteously. That the law in itself is what leads to God's acceptance of us, which then leads them to judge others harshly who are struggling to follow all the laws. In the churches in Rome, people are even starting to boast about how good they are in response to others. Paul responds by arguing that all the good that comes from them is a result of God's gracious love. He reminds them that everyone of them has fallen short at one point or another, and it was by God's grace that they have been able to get back up.

For Jesus, he says that by his gracious love he chooses to set us free from this power that sin can have over us. So, when we are living the right way it isn't because of our own efforts or because we belong to a certain community, but because Jesus chooses to live in and through us in the Holy Spirit. Jesus chooses us, and helps us to live the right way. And when we do fall short Jesus is ready to forgive us. Jesus gives himself up so that we can have a right relationship with God. So, it is in Jesus that we are accepted by God. Not our own doing.

Today is the day we look back and reflect on the Reformation. A challenging time where many lived in fear of God's judgment. Unfortunately, some in the church at the time were abusing their power to perpetuate this judgement creating fear in people about their salvation. Martin Luther challenged this fear, and guided people back to the gospel. The gospel that says Jesus's gracious love is what sets us free. The gospel that is reflected in Paul's letter when he says through faith we are saved.

God chooses us. Jesus chooses to set us free from the power that sin can have on our lives. We may not always be perfect. We may still fall short. But, this sin doesn't destroy us. Instead, we live with hope that in our repentance, in Jesus' sacrifice, we receive a new covenant. A promise that says God's love will be in our hearts, and that God will forgive us for our iniquities breathing new life into us. This is the heart of the Reformation. This is the heart of the gospel.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for freeing us from sin. When we fall short help us trust in your love. And when we see others falling short, humble us. Give us what we need to walk with them. To avoid self-righteousness. To be the loving people you call us to be. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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