

“I Dare You”
Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36
Reformation Sunday, Confirmation

Pastor John R. Pederson
Augustana Lutheran Church
Denver, Colorado

“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

We celebrate today Good News that Martin Luther re-discovered. That news is so counter-intuitive, so stubbornly radical, so shocking it needs to be re-discovered continually by a church that God continues to reform and reform and reform. And for the baptized, it needs to be re-discovered daily.

Daring to *live* by this news will put you at odds with every self-help nostrum, every scheme of salvation offered by your culture, and much of the Christian church as well. It will, as one of my friends put it, “cut you off from whatever allegiances [you] once may have owed; to render [you] without ideology, without metaphysic or political programme, [it will] suspend [you] between heaven and hell without a single ‘ism’ to your name . . . “¹ This news prepares you for the freedom by which the Son makes you free indeed.

The crucified one – the one who presumes to make you free -- does not remain in the past as a quaint and impressive religious figure on which to mediate. He has something to say. To you. Now. So cup your hands around your ears and get ready to hear.²

The one who would make you free says, “I am the Lord your God.” The one who was rejected has come back to announce that your sins are forgiven and that you enjoy God’s presence forever.

These words spoken to you are not sentiments. They aren’t words you dredge up from inside. They are not coaches for life. They are not principles or virtues for you to imitate. These words are not something you can say to yourself. They have to be spoken to you.³

¹ Roy Harrisville, “The Loss of Biblical Authority and Its Recovery,” *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 48.

² “Shema Israel – hear!” Deuteronomy 6:4. Luther commented that “The ears alone are the organs of a Christian.” *LW* 29:224. Cited in Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. by Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 15.

³ Bayer, p. 53.

We take these words that Christ has to say to you literally. They are promises, promises given you by God in baptism, that same baptism you have come here today to affirm. These are words of a watery baptismal promise poured over your actual life story.

Baptism fractures the new from the old. One age is over and the new one is coming. Baptism drowns the old you that insisted on the project of making yourself acceptable before all people and before God. At an end is the you that wants to depend on yourself for life. That you is over, or as Paul would put it, that you is dead.

And daily a new you emerges from that baptismal water. This is a you that comes directly from God's word. This is a new you that lives by grace, by gift. A new you that, *mirabile dictu*, actually trusts these words as true, and delivers you to a "sure and certain" hope for your actual future. This is salvation by trust.⁴ Once you trusted yourself. That self is now dead. Now you trust Christ. In Christ there is a new creation: a new you.

No progress happens in life without returning to these waters. No real courage to live happens in life without returning to this baptism. No freedom ever happens in life without turning back, remembering your baptism, and claiming these promises of God again. This new life that springs from these words spoken to you are "not an exodus from vice to virtue, but from virtue to the grace of God."⁵ God is not interested in making you a better person. God is up to making you a new person. Every day.

A Christian life is not the study of God. We do not here today speak *about* God. We do not here gaze at our navels or eavesdrop on our inner selves. Here God speaks to us. What can be done now is to pray and then answer him.

The faith you confess today is not knowledge and it is not action.⁶ This is a faith that expresses itself as full confidence that God can actually accomplish what God has promised. When you have that full confidence, there you have it all.

I dare you to throw your life into these promises. I dare you to live your life as though these promises are utterly true and can be trusted. I dare you to live your life as though God has obligated himself to you with these promises. I dare you to live in the freedom of this good news.

Dares were a regular part of my growing up. Something new and risky stood before us, and sooner or later someone would say, "I dare you." Your pulse would quicken, your hands would quiver, and then off you would leap. Because of a dare, I did some risky things I probably would never have done otherwise.

⁴ Richard B. Hays, "Salvation by Trust? Reading the bible Faithfully," *Christian Century*, February 26, 1997, 218-23.

⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 408.

⁶ Bayer, p. 43.

Becka takes a cue from her grandmother and dares to “show so much love toward people” that they will know God is with her. Courtney dares to do community service and talk to the one who sits alone at table. Catherine will take risks for Christ’s sake. Emily will dare to “serve Jesus.” Lauren acknowledges that the music she makes is a gift from God, and she dares to share that gift in ministry. Tom dares work for the good of our community in animal shelters and soup kitchens. Rachel has noticed how God works with teenagers, and dares to live in these promises while in the midst of the chaos of high school. She dares to see life as God’s adventure through her.

We are very proud of these young people who will be re-visiting their baptismal promises this morning. They are prepared to affirm that baptism. And because these promises are utterly reliable, they will take some risks in freedom. They will accept this dare.

Paul writes in Galatians, “You were called for freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom for self-indulgence, but through love become slave to one another. . . ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁷ The Son makes you free, and you are free indeed.

God has something to say to you. God says, “I am the Lord your God.” God says all your sins are really forgiven. God says you will be in God’s presence forever.

You have been baptized and you are called for freedom. I dare you to take God at God’s word and live today in that freedom. I dare you to love God and your neighbor today. Because you are free indeed. Free indeed. Amen.

⁷ Galatians 5:13-14.