



Sunday, October 27, 2024  
John 8:31-36 (Reformation & Confirmation Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Lying seems to be a way of life for many people in America today. The book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, reports that 91 percent of those surveyed lie routinely about matters they consider trivial – 36 percent lie about important things; 86 percent regularly lied to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses. But I'm confident, okay, *somewhat confident*, that *none of us* fit into any of these categories – so don't make a liar out of me. Perhaps when we hear these stats then it shouldn't surprise us that there's so much unhappiness in the world. Lies are easy to tell but rarely do they help make a situation better.

So, let me get right to the point – I think it's impossible to read these words of Jesus today without thinking about the reality of the world in which we live. Because it seems like many these days treat "truth" almost as if it's *optional*. And given the rise of alternative facts, conspiracy theories, and all the other misinformation that's swirling around, it's no wonder our world is filled with so much doubt and mistrust.

There's so much of this infecting social media these days. Especially as the presidential election looms. Poll after poll shows Americans are deeply divided, and there seems to be only one thing that all parties can agree on – that this election may be one of the most contentious elections of our time. As a result, emotions are running high, and they're fed on every side by a 24/7 news cycle that seems to rely on fear and anger for its ratings.

Needless to say, I'm desperate for this election to finally be over and I just pray that the political climate will once again shrink back down to its normal size and quit occupying our attention every day the way it does now.

And when that happens, and please God let it be soon, those of us who follow Jesus will need to attend to what is always one of the primary tasks of a Christian – the hard work of reconciliation. And this means engaging in truth-telling, but not only in a speaking truth-to-power kind of way, but also in a self-reflective, confessing our sins kind of way – seeking forgiveness from those we've hurt and forgiving those who have hurt us.

Because here's the thing – no political party has a monopoly on the truth. All politicians, and quite honestly, all of us are prone to "twisting" the facts to make them fit our own biases and interests.

Today is Reformation Sunday, but I want to be clear about something, I have absolutely no intention of giving you a sermon about Martin Luther, or how great the Reformation was, and I don't plan on teaching you about Luther's concept of alien righteousness or giving you a history lesson no matter how engaging some of you would find that to be. What I *am* planning to offer you though, is a little bit of good old-fashioned truth telling.

And here it is – like it or not, *we*, just like Jesus' original audience are captive to sin. Sure, we can try to make as much money as we can, elevate our status as high as possible, pretend all we want, and say "we're fine" every time someone asks how we're doing, but it still doesn't change the fact that we aren't living up to the vision God has for us – and deep down we know it. And that my friends is the hard truth.

Do you remember at the beginning of my sermon when I told you lying seems to be a way of life for many people? And then just a few moments ago when I said I wasn't going to tell you about Martin Luther – well guess what – I lied. Martin Luther defined a "theologian of the cross" as someone who "calls a thing what it is."

And that kind of truth telling is as necessary now as it was during the Reformation – truth-telling about ourselves, our communities, and our world – and truth telling about Jesus Christ who forgives and redeems and makes all things new. Truth telling is an important part of any reformation, and reformation is an important part of being the people of God.



Sunday, October 27, 2024  
John 8:31-36 (Reformation & Confirmation Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Cole, Elsa, Joel, Karla, Kellen, Linnea, Max, and Mira – today is a special day for each of you. And, as you prepare to take this next step in your faith journey, I want to share a really important truth with you. I'd like you to stand up. Go ahead, stand up and turn around. Now look around you and take in the sight of all the people who have gathered today to celebrate, support, and join you in worshipping our God. You come to this moment of Confirmation – not alone – and truthfully, you've never been alone. Those who have loved you – and yes, even those who are no longer present in this life, have carried you and brought you this far by faith. And the good news is that these same people who love you will continue to be present in your life – they will love you, support you, walk beside you, pray for you, and help you let your light shine in all the moments when you will wrestle with this story of Jesus.

The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ demands to be heard even when rejection is sure to be the response. The gospel insists on the fact that the shaping of our moral imaginations is its responsibility. Maintaining the status quo isn't the nature of the church and it certainly isn't the nature of being a follower of Jesus.

Yet each time that we choose fear, silence, or staying seated instead of standing up we're turning away from God's call. But we weren't called to silence and complacency. The world needs us to stand up, to have courage, and to speak truth in to all the places that hold us captive to sin – greed, schedules, self-sufficiency, status, vanity, and even our own egos.

On this and every Reformation Sunday we celebrate the power of God's grace to reform and reshape – a reforming and reshaping that must take place on every level – in our personal lives and relationships, in our churches, and in how we live out our faith in our communities and around the world. And we can do all this because of the freedom given to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

However, sometimes I think we've reduced reformation to a mere accomplishment. But reformation isn't just one more thing to say you've done – reformation is a state of being. And reformation also can't just be an act of looking back because by its very definition it demands a vision for the future.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to always be rooted in the past and simultaneously growing into the future. We *and the Church* must always be reforming in order to live out the love of Jesus in an ever-changing world.

We are called to trust in the freedom given to us in baptism to celebrate and proclaim the truth of the good news of God's grace, and it is Jesus Christ who sets us free every day to do this life-transforming work. Confirmands, today you affirm that freedom by standing before God and this community to claim and proclaim that truth of God's grace in the gift of Jesus Christ.

Freedom matters. It matters to us as individuals, it matters to us as a collective society, and it matters to the systems that structure our lives. And on this Reformation Sunday I hear Jesus saying, *continue to let my word guide you, follow me, and know the truth*. Cole, Elsa, Joel, Karla, Kellen, Linnea, Max, and Mira based on what I read in your faith statements; I believe that you hear Jesus saying this too.

Our families, our country, our world, and our very being are crying out for freedom from the bondage of sin and death. We need the truth to reign over us and set us free. We need Jesus, because it's the saving grace of God's love in Christ Jesus that transforms us and sets us free to proclaim this gospel truth to the world.

My friends, God has been reforming the world long before Martin Luther and the Reformation, and God continues this reforming work each time we speak the truth of Jesus Christ. Cole, Elsa, Joel, Karla, Kellen, Linnea, Max, and Mira – God is calling you and me and all of God's people into this ongoing work of reformation.



Sunday, October 27, 2024  
John 8:31-36 (Reformation & Confirmation Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

And when you understand that God chose for you to be saved and that you didn't choose this for yourself, then and only then will you understand the truth about what it means to be free. Then and only then will you fully understand God's amazing grace and love. And when you finally do, *then* you will experience the truth of this life-saving and life-giving gospel, and it will be your freedom. So, may it be that we all come to know this truth, speak it boldly, and be set free. Thanks be to God. Amen.