

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Imagine if you were exiled from your home, left with no hope, even the covenant between you and God seemingly broken. Imagine Jeremiah is speaking to you with words of hope, words of promise, a new covenant, "The days are surely coming, says the Lord," and the new covenant will be evidence of God's overwhelming love and grace.

This is a fitting start celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Martin Luther's rediscovery of a treasure that the church of his day had largely forgotten. The rediscovery? You've heard it preached every Sunday, it's God's grace, God's abundant grace, the new covenant established by God in and through our Lord Jesus. Today on Reformation Day we celebrate Luther's restoration of a right understanding of that covenant. Luther knew that God's nature, his love, mercy and forgiveness for his wayward people does not waver.

Imagine a weight so burdensome, you cannot carry it, you cannot even bear it, weight that crushes you as you struggle with it. Imagine trying to live with a weight like that. That's the kind of life you would have lived had you been around in Luther's time. The weight of sin, the promise torment in purgatory for you and your loved ones, unless you could buy you or a relative out, and the threat of something worse. Imagine penance that could break you and take whatever you had. Imagine know you could not measure up to God's demands, knowing that you cannot save yourself by your own efforts, but having to try.

Life back then, and Martin Luther's life too, first a student, then a monk, no grace, nothing of God's love, nothing but to try to live to standards you could not reach. Weight so burdensome, life a torment, that's Luther's early life, as an Augustinian friar, as a priest, as a professor of OT at the university in Wittenberg. No matter that he was a Hebrew scholar and fair in Greek, it was all for naught.

Then a rediscovery of something well known in the early church, but largely forgotten by the Roman church of which Luther was part. Through study of scripture, he realized that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, not by keeping the law, not by buying indulgences, not through penance not through trying to earn God's favor through works. From Romans "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

His efforts to reform the church led to a split with the Roman church, led to a new denomination, which against his wishes bears his name. Now as it happened, Luther later wrote something that seems paradoxical, contradictory. He wrote: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none." In addition: "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Now this has a direct bearing on you and I this morning.

Jesus tells us: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will

know the truth, and the truth will make you free." So what truth? It's literally a body of truth, our Lord Jesus. The truth is Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. And we know that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word is Jesus, and scripture is the Word written down, and the words that Jesus said. Jesus identifies himself as the "Way and the Truth and the Life." Jesus tells us that if we continue in his word we are his disciples, in other words, we walk in the way, which is Jesus, he is the truth, and in him we have life, a life of freedom. Not freedom to do anything we want, but freedom to do as we ought, to walk as disciples. We have spiritual freedom, we are not held down by a burdensome weight, the weight of sin. We're still sinners, but through Jesus not in bondage to sin.

The Son has made us free, free to serve God, to serve our neighbors, free from hoarding possessions, scheming for power and authority over our brothers and sisters, free to serve God, to serve our neighbor, to do both in love, through love. We are free to live an abundant life as disciples serving God not out of fear because we are loved and we respond in the same way. My friends, we are free, really free!

AMEN