

Here I Stay—The Household of God

Reformation Sunday; Series C

John 8:31-36

In April of 1521 at the Imperial Diet of Worms a resolved Martin Luther stood before Charles V, the Emperor of all of Rome to defend his writings and the work of the Reformation. An imperial diet at this time was an assembly of the highest elected officials of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther was asked multiple times by the Emperor and the assembly to recant his writings and his position regarding heresy in the Roman Church. After careful consideration and deliberation Luther responded bravely to the assembly with these words, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!”

Close to 500 years later on this day that we celebrate the work of the Reformation, we can echo the words of Luther while putting a little spin on them. Using the words of St. John the Evangelist from the Gospel reading this morning we can say boldly, “Here I *stay*. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!” On this Reformation Sunday the Gospel reading would have us consider the household of God as the place where we *stay*. We take up residence in our Father’s house as baptized, forgiven, and redeemed children of God, sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. We have been set free to be his children by the work of Jesus Christ, the firstborn son, our faithful brother.

The Gospel writer, St. John, calls us to think about the meaning and application of the Gospel by considering the analogy of *a household*. We can marvel at the mercy of our God that he would talk about the important, serious, “life or death” topic of the Gospel of salvation with words that we can understand. All people, regardless of age, sex, race, or ethnicity, can relate to the analogy of a household. We were all physically born into a household here on earth as sons or daughters, children of a mother and father. We all currently have vocations as father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, or grandparent. We can marvel at the fact that in our Gospel reading Jesus proclaims the truth of the God’s redemption for all people in a way that is accessible for all people.

Jesus uses the analogy of the household to teach his Jewish audience about the truth of God’s Word, the truth of the Gospel. He says to them, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32). These three are related, truth, the Gospel, and freedom. Those who belong to the household of God through Christ rejoice in all three, truth, the Gospel, and freedom. Yet, Jesus’ original Jewish hearers in the Gospel reading weren’t buying it. In short, they believed that they did not need God’s grace nor faith in Christ, the Messiah in order to be a part of the household of God. They believed that they were born into it. They believed that they were a part of the household of God simply by being Jewish people of the nation of Israel. They believed that they had freedom and truth even without the Gospel—without Jesus. And so in our reading Jesus uses the analogy of the household to help his Jewish audience see that without the Gospel, without Jesus, they do not have truth, and, therefore, they are not free.

A few months ago I started watching the show *Downton Abbey*. The show is set in Yorkshire, England in the early part of the 20th century. It focuses on the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants in the Downton Abbey estate. The

viewer learns a lot about a household from watching *Downton Abbey*. Particularly, the viewer learns a lot about the makeup and customs of an aristocratic household in England at this time period. As a viewer I witnessed the incredible differences between a member of the household and a servant of the household. To be sure, there is a great deal of kind and compassionate interaction between the members of the house and the servants in the show. But one thing is unmistakably clear throughout; a servant is not a member of the household in the same way that the son or daughter is a member. The servants are hired workers that work for the Crawley family. They are treated with kindness by the family but can be fired at will. Their role as members of the household, even as servants, is not guaranteed. There is no obligation for the family to care for their future well-being. The three daughters of Lord Grantham, the head of the estate, however, were born into the family. The family sees it as their obligation to make sure that their daughters have proper suitors and are well provided for into the future. After all, “here they *stay*” as members of the family, residents of the household.

As Jesus uses the analogy of a household in the Gospel reading he makes the claim that his Jewish audience who no longer believes in him (Jn 8:31) is currently seeking to live and stay in the household of God as servants and not as sons and daughters. As the Bible teaches, only they who believe and trust in Christ and are baptized into Christ (Mk 16:16) can be certain that they are born again (Jn 3:5; Titus 3:5) into the household of God (Gal 6:10) as his adopted children (Gal 4:1-7), sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. Only a son and daughter of God, the Father can confidently and boldly say, “Here I *stay*!” A servant or slave who seeks to be a part of the household of God by trusting in his or her ethnicity, the faith of his or her parents, the decision he or she made, or, in the context of the reformation, the indulgence he or she bought, that person cannot confidently cry, “Here I *stay*!” There is no guarantee of being set free since only the Son sets us free (Jn 8:36). Only in Christ can we be confident that we rejoice in all three fruits of the household of God as we discovered them in the Gospel reading: truth, the Gospel, and freedom.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, being confident that you are a part of the household of God is important. It is important that we can confidently say, “Here I *stay*! Forever!” As Martin Luther reminded us through the work of the Reformation, such confidence comes by knowing that our adoption as sons and daughters of God in the household of God is not a result of anything we have done or can contribute. “We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and *keeps* it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (*The Small Catechism*, “The Third Article,” LSB 323). You were reborn into the household of God.

In the waters of your Holy Baptism you received your rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). You were adopted as a child of God. Not by any choice or decision you made, but rather by virtue of the decision God made. He gave you his Triune name, the name of his household. He claimed you as his very own. He gave you his promise to never leave you nor forsake you. He washed you clean from the stain of Sin that would separate you from living freely as a child of God. So continue to abide in his word and continue in his truth as you have been set free to be his child. “Here you *stay*—the household of God.” Amen.