



Mt. Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church

January 13, 2022

*"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,
and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- John 8:31-2*

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I hope you are all doing well and staying healthy. Thank you for working with us as we have had to reinstate our mask requirement. We all hoped we would be done with this by now! Several families in the church have had Covid recently, so we are trying to keep everyone as safe as possible. And let's all join in praying for this plague to end!

This Sunday, we are returning to our study of the Gospel of John. We have been away from it since late November, so many of us have forgotten where we left off. I feel like an old TV announcer saying, "When last we saw our heroes..." We are still in the first half of John, the part that is always a mix of miracles and controversies. Back in November, we did the first half of chapter 8, which opens with the story of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus confronts her accusers and tells them that the one who is without sin should cast the first stone. From the oldest to the youngest, they drop their stones and fade away. Then Jesus says to her, "Nor do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). What follows is a long dispute between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees about Jesus' identity and authority.

This week, we will be looking into the second half of this dispute, especially Jesus' words in verses 31-32, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." When Jesus said this, the scribes and Pharisees push back and claim they have never been slaves, because they are children of Abraham. Jesus responds that because they are sinful people, they are enslaved to sin. And Jesus has come exactly for this, to set people free from their bondage.

Many people live under the illusion that if they do whatever they want, they have freedom. Unfortunately, if what they want is not within the will of God, it is never enough. With addictions, each time they use something, they need just a little more to get the same high. And a little more next time, and a little more. What once felt like freedom quickly becomes bondage. Those addictions can be to drugs or alcohol or porn, but they can also be to things like what Paul mentions in his letters, things like gossip, unforgiveness, discord, jealousy, and selfish ambition.

The thing is, Jesus does not come to condemn us for this behavior. He comes to set us free from the bondage that traps us. Prisoners cannot set themselves free from their jail cells. Jesus is the one who has paid the price for our prison terms, so He is the one who is able to open wide the doors, to set the captives free.

That is what grace is all about. We can't earn the key to our jail cell. But if we believe in Christ and abide in His Word, He sets us free to live a full life in Him. As we receive grace to walk in freedom, we are also called to offer it to others, to offer freedom in Christ instead of condemnation.

As you prepare for worship this week, think about some area of your life that you feel trapped in. Is there a behavior or attitude that is draining you dry? Lay it before the Lord and ask for His help and guidance to open that prison door for you and set you free.

Blessings,
Pastor Carolyn