

Reformation, 2007
October 28, 2007
Romans 3:19-28; John 8: 31-36
Title: The Son makes you free

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

I celebrated on Wednesday with Kristian Lee and his mother Michelle his successfully passing his driver's test on Monday. There it was Kristian's picture proudly displayed under the title Provisional Driver's License.

Got to hear Kristian's accounting of his behind the wheel exam.
All of us who drive likely remember something of that experience.
Let's face it—that singular event is determinative of one step further
Toward independence. I learned from Kristian parallel parking
is no longer required; although the three point turn still is.

But here's one that is new to me: according to Kristian
The instructor asks you to on command to slam on the brakes.

Anyway, one thing hasn't changed: Kristian was left hanging, wondering if he had passed. The long, silent walk back from the car, into the building, not knowing, but assuming you flunked. And then to hear the examiner say,

“Kristian, how will you pay for your license?”

There is a deep urge to pass, not just a driving test. To have
It stamped across your forehead—You did it.
To raise your children unscathed by drugs or low self-esteem—to have
Pressed on your parental heart—you did it.
To juggle all that is on our plates today—

To manage the family schedule; provide good food; have some
savings; plan for retirement; exercise;
Stay healthy; be a leader; navigate the internet and email; have
A proper work/life balance; find time for Christ; enjoy the moment;
have a personal mission statement;
Read the right books; know your wines and restaurants;
Manage your portfolio; stay married; keep in touch with the
Relatives; be sure to smile; live in the right neighborhood; pay the

Mortgage; stay positive;
go to church; do your part for
The draught; take the right position on the war.

You passed. You paid the price.

The Apostle Paul would disagree. Paul's all about
Placing your confidence in Christ Jesus; not your pass card.

Paul has the audacity to stand up and shout 'All of us fall short of
Passing'—There is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall
Short of the glory of God.

We see in our Gospel the deep desire to believe otherwise—
That we can measure up. For here is Jesus declaring that
He is the source of freedom and the knee jerk reaction:

**WE ARE DESCENDENTS OF ABRAHAM AND HAVE NEVER BEEN
SLAVES TO ANYONE.** What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made
free?'

This is my pass card, my heritage? I'm a descendent of Abraham or
Luther,
And yet a Lutheran magazine poll
Revealed that 65% of Lutherans polled believe that the mercy
Of God given through Christ is dependent on my effort, my pass card.

God doesn't need our good works. Our neighbors need our good works.

Thad Stem was walking one day down the street where a road
Crew was digging a hole. As he passed Thad uttered:
"That's a right good sized hole you are digging."

"Yeah," one of the workman replied, "We're digging a hole big enough
So we can bury every sorry scoundrel who lives in this town."
"Who's going to be left to cover us all up?" Stem replied. (From
Blood Done Signed My Name by Tim Tyson)

One day while starting to bicycle the Blue Ridge Parkway I feel behind my Fellow travelers. I told them to go ahead of me and I'd catch up. Instinctively, when I came to the Parkway intersection I turned to go north.

And immediately came upon huge down hill. Coasted down about 3 miles. Came to the first pull off where I thought they were waiting for me. Weren't there!
I was heading in the wrong direction.
And had to turn around and face that long climb.
Such wrong turns are reminders of our on-going need
For the rich love of Jesus.

What are we to do with our failures, mistakes? Do they define us? Paul demands that we are all heading down the wrong path, even Those who are marked with the honored You Pass.

What defines us is the Cross of Jesus.
Which is why Martin Luther so fervently objected to any Pass card.
One day we will not make the three point turn.

And the judgement has been placed on Christ. Free.

Today, Anna Kate Karmanos through the waters of Baptism has Placed on her the stamp of Jesus' mercy. It is the only stamp that Matters. Pure gift. Out of sheer generosity; Jesus does it all.

Do we realize what radical, life shaping news this is. If the son makes you free, you are free indeed. That's the stamp Jesus puts on us.
It's not Provisional Driver's License;
It's Permission to Drive Granted.

In November 1983, an all-white jury in Clayton County, Georgia, took 40 minutes to convict an African-American man named Calvin Johnson of raping a white woman. The jury ignored the testimony of 4 witnesses who supported Johnson's alibi. Standing before the judge who had Just sentenced him to life in prison, Mr. Johnson declared:

"With God as my witness, I have been falsely accused..... I just

pray in the name of Jesus that the truth will eventually be brought out.’ Sixteen years later, in June 1999, holding a New Testament in his hand, Calvin Johnson stood before another judge who signed an order to set him free. DNA tests showed conclusively that he could not have committed the crime.

Sixteen years in prison! What was Mr. Johnson’s attitude about those who had done him wrong? His faith in Christ had gotten him through Each day of 16 years, never allowing him to despair. He said he Had no lasting enmity. “Bitterness will destroy you. Now I need a job!” (Quoted in Christ vs. Adam: Kosovo and Beyond by Kleming Rutledge)

Dear fellow Christians, by virtue of your baptism you belong to Christ. Hear again the Gospel message:

“Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the
Redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
Whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood,
Effective through faith.”

Now we are ready to hear our Lord say: “So if the Son makes you free,
You will be free indeed.”

God in Christ, reforming the Church.
Happy Reformation Sunday

On Reformation Sunday, we are called on behalf of the whole human family to ask: IS IT TRUE THAT FOLLOWING THE LAW WILL HELP US SUCCESS? If we just make the right choices, even knowing when to slam On the brakes, we'll avoid any crash? That somehow we can tip the balance sheets with our Good behavior?

Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, would with all his might Declare NO. By making the right choices we do not tip the scales In our favor. We cannot make the balance sheets clean by What we do. For Luther the selling of indulgences By the church preyed on the desire to determine one's Destiny. This paper purchased my place.

When the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs. Luther wouldn't buy it. The gifts of freedom in Christ are not for sale.

With progress we might assume we would never fall in that trap. Those long ago issues are long ago. We know that God's grace Is a free, unconditional gift. And would never _____

To paraphrase those who spoke to Jesus in John 8:
"We are descendants of Luther and have never been slaves to anyone." And yet as recently as 4 years ago, a Lutheran magazine poll revealed that 65% of Lutherans believe that the mercy of God given through Christ is conditional, dependent on my behavior.

Many of us are, if not enslaved, bound by a false view of our need for Christ. The issue is still here. It doesn't skip generations or stop in 1518. We are in bondage to sin. Taken captive to the power of sin and death. And being descendent of Abraham or Luther doesn't give us an exemption pass.

At it's worst this is a power motivating us to hate immigrants, Ignore the elderly, gamble away our family's livelihood, drag a

Young child across a parking lot, mortgages sold like ice cream. Our case is terminal.

Paul is unwavering: There is no distinction, since all have Sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

One day Thad Stem was walking down an Oxford, NC Street where a road crew were digging huge hole.

“That’s a right good sized hole you are digging, Thad said.

“Yeah,” one of the workman replied, “We’re digging a hole big enough so we can bury every sorry scendrel in Oxford.”

Who’s going to be left to cover us all up? Stem replied

The law of sin is stronger than we are.

And everyone who commits sin, is a slave to sin.

Fleming Rutledge in speaking about her bondage to sin Identifies that she was able to avoid many a life issue. Her slate was Relatively clean, she got her driver’s license.

Except when it came to procrastination. After confessing to a Bible Study group that procrastination was her besetting sin, a well meaning Person sent her a tape entitled Twelve Easy Steps to avoid Procrastination. Rutledge burst out laughing.

If I could avoid procrastination by taking 12 easy steps My problem would have been solved long ago.