

We're decked out in festival red.

The music rings out in celebration.

Our voices rise to praise God and give thanks for the  
Reformation of the Church,

499 years ago as it began,

And today, as it continues to shape the life of the  
Church.

499 years ago,

Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to the church door in  
Wittenberg.

All because, essentially, he felt freed.

For the first time in his life of faith,

Luther had experienced God's amazing and abundant grace,

And suddenly the chains that had kept him bound—

The ever-unattainable perfection of his soul,

The constant reminders of failings,

The overwhelming grip of his own  
sinfulness—

These chains broke free through  
a new hearing of the Gospel,

Through the Word of  
God in Christ that  
changed Luther. . .

And  
changes  
us.

Really, the Reformation all came about through the freedom that Jesus brings.

Freedom from saving ourselves,  
And freedom for serving others.

In our Gospel this Reformation morning,  
We hear from Jesus that “the truth will make you free,”  
That Christ will make us free.

And this is such good news,  
Because really,  
We are all stuck and mired in our sin.  
We are all gripped and bound by powers we can’t  
seem to shake.

The things that enslave us are different for each of us,  
But they all voice the same message to us:  
That we’ll never escape.  
That we’ll never be free.

Many feel enslaved by the land,  
The neighborhood,  
The community into which they’ve been born.  
Living in fear for their lives,  
Reacting in violence,  
Feeling powerless.

Many are enslaved just by where they live.  
Some of us feel enslaved by our physical bodies,  
As illness and age steal away abilities,  
And we look in the mirror and don’t even recognize  
ourselves anymore.

Some are enslaved by society and history that has taught people to look  
at and treat them negatively,

or suspiciously,  
or unjustly.

Calling names,  
stealing away rights.

Many are enslaved by our bank accounts.

No matter how much or how little is in them.

Whether we're shackled by surmounting debts and bills,  
Or bound by the greed of wanting it all to ourselves.

Some are enslaved by thoughts, compulsions, or mental illness that  
constantly dictates life.

Feeling stuck inside the head,  
thoughts and panic and depression paralyzing life,  
work,  
relationships.

Some of us are enslaved by status, position, the way others perceive us.

You're smart,

You're popular,

You're successful,

And yet you can't ever let go and just be YOU.

Some of us are enslaved by the desire to be smart, popular, successful.

Constantly comparing yourself to others,

Always fighting feelings of jealousy,

Never able to let go and just be YOU.

Some of us are enslaved by bitterness,

By old disagreements from years gone by that we just can't let go  
of,

By anger fueled by hateful thoughts,

By a refusal to forgive and forget,

Because they don't deserve it.

We are enslaved by sin.  
And we cannot free ourselves.

But Jesus can.

Jesus does.

To those who suffer from these and other forms of slavery,

Jesus says,

“You are set free.”

To those who don't feel enslaved,

Jesus says,

“You are set free.”

To those who have a hard time recognizing and acknowledging the  
enslavement of others,

Jesus says,

“You are set free.”

The truth is clear,

The truth is freedom.

The truth is Christ.

And if Christ makes us free,

We are free indeed.

But freedom in Christ isn't the freedom the world gives.

Freedom in Christ feels like a splash of water,

A drowning,

A death. . .

A rising,

A new life,

An eternal life.

Freedom in Christ feels like water poured,  
    Cross marked,  
        Life claimed.

In baptism,  
    We are set free.

Freedom in Christ isn't like the freedom the world gives.  
Freedom in Christ tastes like bread and wine,  
    A sacrifice of Christ's body,  
        A death. . .for us.  
            A Meal that forgives,  
                That unifies,  
                    That strengthens.

In Holy Communion,  
    We are set free.

And so, on this Festival Day of the Reformation,  
    As we give thanks for the re-forming of the Church inspired by the  
    Holy Spirit and carried out by Martin Luther and the reformers,  
        We join in the re-formation of the Church today through the  
        promise that we are made free.

We are always being re-formed,  
    Re-created,  
        Re-shaped,  
            Re-newed by Jesus Christ.

Being set free does that—  
    It makes you new.  
        And it keeps making you new,  
            Regardless of how life and the world enslave you.

We are set free.

It's what the Reformation was all about.

It's what the Reformation continues to inspire today.

Christ's Church—all expressions of it—is called to proclaim freedom!

We are called to share and spread and gift others with the freedom that Jesus brings.

Freedom is not only what Jesus promises is to come,

It's what Jesus makes real for us now.

Today.

This moment.

Every moment.

Jesus sets us free,

And we are free indeed.