

Let us pray... God of wonder, you are holy. Create a space for holiness in our lives. Usher your Spirit in our midst. Teach us to build towards a better future where your Spirit transforms and reforms. A place where truth is lived. A place where all are free... Amen.

My sister and I grew up watching a few favorite movies over and over... One of those moves was... Free Willy

If you are not familiar with the movie, it's about a boy, Jessie who makes a very unusual friend... A killer whale that is kept in captivity named Willy.

And at the end of the movie, in an epic gravity defying scene, Jessie is able to help get Willy to the ocean and to his freedom.

He is able to do this by signaling to Willy, to jump up out of the water over a land barrier of rocks and into the expansive ocean on the other side...

And while parts of this scene were created by special effects, the majority of this scene was filmed in an actual place, in Astoria.... Oregon.

A place my sister and I were able to go a few years ago... And yes... We were very excited.

The place was beautiful and it felt like an embodiment of freedom, looking out over the expansive ocean on one side and imagining Willy free to roam.

An image that is often associated with freedom... Freedom as understood by a place without bounds, where possibilities are endless...

A place to get to, to work towards... Through our actions and goals.

So that we can have the freedom to do what we want when we want...

But this concept of freedom is quite different than what our gospel paints today...

According to Jesus what sets us free, has nothing at all to do with us...

What sets us free is truth...

Truth found by abiding in God's word... As Jesus says "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Which sounds like a beautiful thing... But truth as beautiful as it is can also hurt...

It can be hard to hear sometimes.

For example, Wednesday night the adult study met.

We had a good conversation, but we also touched on a lot of difficult truths in the world. Such as the horrific loss of innocent lives in the Middle East and the uncertainty of the future...

Then when I got home, Keenan had the TV on. And on the TV was the heartbreaking news of the mass shootings in Maine.

And also, that very night, much closer to home, just north of Wausau, was a devastating accident. A car accident that took the life of a 16-year-old boy. That left 3 others injured...

So much devastation in such a short heartbreaking time...

And there are many other devastating things that have happened since Wednesday night... Because we live in a creation that is broken and flawed.

Story after story the Bible lays claim to this truth... Senseless violence and death... Oppression and fear...

But thankfully there is also goodness in the Bible... As it is in the Bible that we also find life, justice, and hope...

Because the Bible is one place, of many, where the Word of God dwells...

As we hear in the Gospel of John... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things came into being through him.

And then we are told that the Word became flesh and LIVED among us!

Living by entering into our brokenness, sin, suffering, and even death.

Death of God, through the Word of God, in the body of Christ...

Which means that the Word of God was not only in the beginning, but the Word of God was also in the end...

An ending that has since become a new beginning.

Where God has done a new thing... Birthing life from death...

Which means that even in our darkest fears, there is hope... Because the Word is among us still.

And since the Word is with us, then Christ is with you, in your hard times. Christ is there to hold your tears, your burdens, and your fears. He is alongside you in all things, always.

He is patiently awaiting your abiding presence.

Because the Word of God does something to us...

The Word of God itself is transformative.... First the Word of God created all things... Then the Word of God was spoken and carried down generation after generation by the Israelites... Then it was written, edited, shared, compiled...

And then the Word of God was made visible on a whole nother level... The Word lived...So that the Word could be spoken, written, and shared again and again...

So, that all may know the truth... so that all may be free.

Freedom that comes from being in relationship with the transformative Word...

Which means that we need to continue returning to God's Word... Because our lives and our callings are ever changing and reforming...

Giving you freedom to try new things... To be curious and explore...

By trying something new, or returning to something that was life-giving in the past.

Freeing you from barriers or granting you truth to rise up over them... Just like Willy literally did at the end of the movie...

Because Willy was not created to be in captivity, and neither were we...

Which is why Christ broke the power of sin, so that we are no longer captive to sin.

But so often we forget this truth, especially when horrible things infiltrate our lives or the lives of our loved ones.

And what a beautiful opportunity to be reminded of Christ's transforming truth than on Reformation Sunday.

A day that boldly claims the transformative power that takes place through the Word of God...

The Word of God that Martin Luther brought to the people of God... By translating the Bible into German so they could read and abide in God's word, to know for themselves what was being said.

Because when we abide in the Word, we will know the truth and the truth will make us free...

Freeing all of who you are, bumps, bruises and all.

Opening your heart to the transformative power of the Word, because reformation cannot happen on our own.

It only happens through God... As God's dwelling presence is what sets us free... Amen.