

**Sermon Notes – October 30,, 2022**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. John 8: 31-36**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“The Good News of God’s Grace”**

No less than for Hosea, the image of Israel as God’s spouse is an important one for Jeremiah. Now, after chapters of castigating Israel for their unfaithfulness, threatening divorce and warning of defeat and exile, Jeremiah assures his audience of God’s continuing faithfulness. In the face of the imminent sack and destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah promises an end to the coming disaster. And he promises more as well: God will establish a new covenant, in which forgiveness is fulfilled in the transforming gift of the Holy Spirit, establishing what Martin Luther called the “new Adam,” our true self, who delights in relationship with God rather than running from Him.

The concept of the righteousness of God, mentioned several times in the second reading, is an important one. Trivializing the term leads to despair. It might mean that God is just and gives us what we deserve: so many impatient words can outweigh so much forbearance: a kindness offered even in part from cowardice or in hope of reward does not count. Luther feared, indeed strongly disliked, this righteousness and this God. But like the good Old Testament professor he was, he noticed something strange in the Psalms: when God judges righteously, it is never to condemn. In righteousness, God always saves, frees, heals, and forgives. God’s righteousness is not fairness, but mercy, grounded in the divine promises. And (as Paul argues at length elsewhere in Romans, and Jeremiah does as well), we are freed to join in God’s mission, not out of fear of rejection, but out of gratitude for inclusion.

Jesus’ audience in the gospel reading seems to be those former followers who at the end of chapter 6 were offended by his claim to be the living bread promising life to those who eat his flesh and drink

his blood. Now opponents, they are further offended by Jesus' declaring that they were slaves who needed to be made free. Rather than listing the various empires, small and large, past and present, they had enslaved Israel; Jesus makes the unanswerable response that they are enslaved by sin. And he adds the word of hope, that such slavery can be temporary and does not define a person. Notice that Jesus is speaking of two different households-that of sin (where one is a slave) and that of God (where one has been declared and is treated as free). And notice as well the close identification between the Son and the truth-an important connection for John, from the prologue to the trial by Pilate. And His Grace shall set you free indeed!