

Sermon Notes – October 27, 2024
The Holy Gospel of St. John 8: 31-36
Peace Lutheran Church
“Christ Sets Us Free”

By the time Jeremiah declared God's promise of a “new covenant” with the political entities known as the “house of Israel” and the “house of Judah” (Jer. 31: 31), neither existed. Both dynasties had ended after falling to conquering armies. To make a new covenant with these peoples, God would first have to restore or resurrect them. Little wonder then, that immediately after this oracle, comes a promise from the Lord that He considers Israel part of creation's “fixed order,” and that Israel's offspring will never come to naught but will remain “a nation before me [in my presence] forever” (3: 36).

The “new covenant”- in which God writes His *Torah* (defined: teachings) directly on the peoples’ hearts and not on tablets or scrolls, and the intimate knowledge of Him that comes from such writing - gives life, identity, and vocation to this re-created nation. No matter where they live and despite all the failings of the past, they shall be God's people. He has chosen to start over, and so shall His people in whom the *Torah* dwells.

John's gospel used a reverse form of Jeremiah's image to make much the same point. Jesus says those who abide in his “word”- those who make Him, His teaching, and the truth of God revealed in His life and death both their habit and habitat - are His people (8: 31). All who dwell in Christ, the Word made flesh, live in the freedom that only the one who *is* the truth can grant. Even sin, the sneakiest of enslavers, cannot take their freedom or make them obey anything or anyone but the Truth - the Truth whom Pilate put on trial, naively thinking he held Jesus' life in his hands.

Paul nearly wears out the language of justice, justification, and righteousness (all from the Greek *dikaiois* and *dikaosyne*) in today's reading from Romans. One of Martin Luther's theological “breakthroughs” came with recognizing God's very different kinds of righteousness: the righteousness that holds humankind accountable for failure to uphold His demands, and the righteousness He reveals in the mercy and forgiveness of Christ's atoning reconciliation of His death. All God's righteous words

to humankind are one kind or the other, either law or gospel, demand or promise. It is by faith that we either flee or fall into the righteousness which binds us in Christ's death, which thus allows us to live in the freedom and forgiveness of God's righteous mercy.

Jeremiah, Jesus, and Paul all agree that God's people cannot reform themselves when they are enslaved to sin. Only the Father works a new creation. This always entails dying and, with the Spirit's intervention, starting over.