**First Reading Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*The renewed covenant will not be breakable, but like the old covenant it will expect the people to live upright lives. To know the Lord means that one will defend the cause of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:16). The renewed covenant is possible only because the Lord will forgive iniquity and not remember sin. Our hope lies in a God who forgets.*

31The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Psalm 46**

1God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea; 3 though its waters rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble with its tumult. 4There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be shaken; God shall help it at the break of day. 6The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks, and the earth melts away. 7The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. 8Come now, regard the works of the Lord, what desolations God has brought upon the earth; 9 behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world; who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire. 10“Be still, then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.” 11The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

**Second Reading Romans 3:19-28**

*Paul’s words stand at the heart of the preaching of Martin Luther and other Reformation leaders. No human beings make themselves right with God through works of the law. We are*

*brought into a right relationship with God through the divine activity centered in Christ’s death. This act is a gift of grace that liberates us from sin and empowers our faith in Jesus Christ.*

19Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. 27Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

**Gospel John 8:31-36**

*Jesus speaks of truth and freedom as spiritual realities known through his word. He reveals the truth that sets people free from sin.*

31Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” 34Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

**Sermon**

At their meeting in late September our ELCA Conference of Bishops…that is, the group of all the synod bishops in the ELCA…released a statement on the need to speak the truth. The statement begins by naming the story of Adam and Eve as the way in which evil entered our

world in the form of deception and lies. And yet, the statement reminds us that we proclaim the power of Christ who is, “the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) and that we know that the power of truth is greater than the power of deceit. They go on to condemn hateful, deceptive, violent speech that has become common in our national discourse and to refuse the normalization of lies and deceit. In contrast, the Conference of Bishops make commitments to speaking the truth and pointing to the one who is truth and has appealed to us all to join them. They give specific steps that they suggest are good ways of following through on this commitment. You can find them in the statement which I will make available on our Facebook page for you to read on your own.

We seem to be facing some real challenges in knowing what is truth these days. And one example of that being problematic was in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene when there were mistruths about what FEMA was doing, which resulted in some folks refusing to be helped. I hope that if they refused help that they were ok on their own. The point is that the mistrust that was built up by hearing things that were not true actually got in the way of important work. It hurt rather than helped the people who believed it.

That example was probably one of the easier instances of misinformation to address. It seems that every day we are faced with the issue of knowing what to believe. Just when it seems that an issue is pretty straightforward, a dissenting voice comes along to say that there is more to the issue. The problem is, it isn’t that we are all seeing the same issue and coming at it with different approaches. It is that some of us see a problem where others of us don’t see a problem and vice versa. It is that we don’t agree on what is evil, what is good, what is neutral. Often, it seems that we aren’t all even living in the same reality. This has certainly put some strain and pressure on our relationships and our shared life together.

This weekend we commemorate Reformation Sunday, a day in which we remember the reforming work of the Spirit in the church during Martin Luther’s time. Although Luther intended the reforming work to happen within the church of which he was a part, he was excommunicated from the church at that time. As a result, his reforming work gave rise to a new church body, which was given the name Protestant and we Lutherans, named after Luther, are an off shoot of Protestant. Luther, too, was seeking to reveal the truth, specifically the truth about relationship with God, at a time when that truth was being distorted.

The Scripture passages that we have today were chosen to go along with the Reformation theme of renewal, truth, relationship with God and the freedom and forgiveness that comes from that relationship. I’m going to focus specifically on the passage from the gospel of John 8. In Chapter 8, Jesus is in a back-and-forth conversation, first with those who had believed in him but had fallen away and then with religious leaders. Here, when it refers to “the Jews” it is most likely referring to Judeans, who are people that resided in the southern part of the territory, around Jerusalem, as opposed to those who resided in the northern part of the territory near Galilee.

In this particular part of the conversation, Jesus speaks of the importance of truth as his disciples. In particular, Jesus is referring to the truth about God and about who Jesus is in relationship to God and what that means for God’s human creation. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” The word “continue” in this verse is *meno* in Greek, which can also be translated “abide” or “remain.” Throughout John’s gospel, it conveys not a person constantly reading a book but our position in relationship with Jesus and his teachings. So those who spend time with Jesus, those who interact with Jesus, those who watch what he does, listen to what he says…they are his disciples. In other words, discipleship is relationship with Jesus. Those who are in relationship with Jesus will know the truth about who God is and how God relates to humanity.

The problem at this time was not that people weren’t worshiping God. The problem at this time was that the people, including and especially the most influential religious leaders, did not understand anything about the character of their God. They forgot that God was a God who sets people free…those in conversation forgot that piece of their history when they reply to Jesus, “We…have never been slaves to anyone.” God had set their ancestors free from slavery in Egypt!

The truth is that God is a God of freedom, not a God of slavery. God created humanity with value for freedom as long as that freedom does not harm or limit the freedom of others. And yet somehow, at this point in the story, there were people who were treated as though they were valued less, there were people who were not as free as others. There was injustice and inequity, and the reason was because humanity had distorted religious practices to the point that God was no longer recognizable. The truth of who God is was so far from what was

practiced by the most powerful religious leaders of the time. Those who benefited from the way things were didn’t want to hear anything about Jesus and his truth.

But to those who are drawn into relationship with Jesus, Jesus reveals the truth about God. The God who created all things, who created all of humanity in God’s image has placed great value upon everything that God has created…every plant, every animal, the water, the air, the child, the man, the woman, the aged, the injured, the disabled, the sick, people of every background and nationality, of any sexual orientation. As long as something or someone was created by God, has breath, bears the image of God that something or someone has value and is intended for goodness and well-being.

Since that was not happening, and still does not happen today, since this kind of brokenness fractures our relationships with God and with one another, Christ died for us to demonstrate our value to God so that we too would die to this sin and brokenness and rise with him to live out the truth of God that I laid out a bit ago. This is the Christ in whose word we dwell…the word of love and mercy, the word of repentance and reconciliation, the word of justice and equality. The truth that Christ reveals is that God brings us into relationship so we can see as God sees…that we value our relationship with creation and human beings as much as God values relationship with all of God’s creation.

This is the truth through which we view the world as Christ’s disciples. This truth sets us free to care for all of creation and any neighbor. This truth sets us free to work for reconciliation and peace with those we have wronged. This truth rings true no matter what other truths we’re being told to believe. Christ will remind us of this truth always as we abide in his word, in his presence. Christ is with us to keep us always in the presence, in the love, in the freedom of God. Amen.