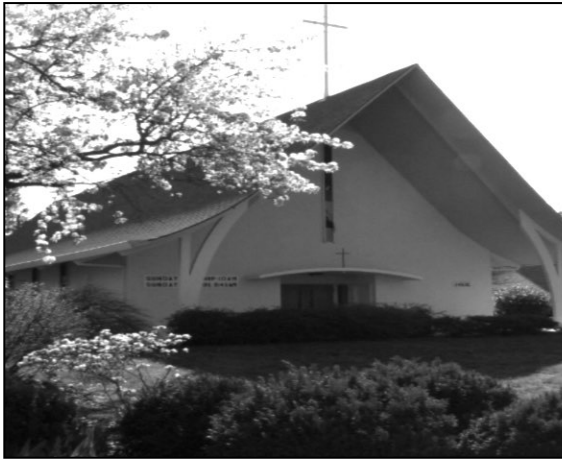




## **REFORMATION SUNDAY**

(Pentecost 20)

October 26, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

**THE LESSONS:** Jeremiah 31:31-34;  
Psalm 46; Romans 2:19-28; John 8:31-36

**THE SERMON:** “Truth? Can You Handle...  
Truth?”

**Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

With all the stuff going on in the media and the accusations of “fake news” and all the misinformation disseminated through the internet, it makes me think about that famous quote from the 1992 movie, “A Few Good Men.” I have to confess I haven’t seen the movie but the line quoted by the character, Col. Nathan Jessup, played by Jack Nicholson, is famous. In that scene, Lt. Daniel Kaffee, played by Tom Cruise, suspects that Jessup had something to do with the death of a soldier and tells Jessup that he wants the truth, to which Jessup barks, “You can’t handle the truth!” And, then he launches into a lengthy monologue about how sometimes things happen that the public doesn’t need to know about because the benefits of not knowing sometimes outweighs the consequences of the truth. Even though I didn’t see the movie, I’ve heard about that scene and wondered about that premise. I do know that for years parents operated with that idea when it came to talking about sex with their kids. And, for years, homosexuality was in the “closet” with the assumption that we can’t handle the truth.. Now, with all the polarization, even in the news, it’s hard to know what the truth is and Col. Jessup’s comment, “You can’t handle the truth!”, makes me wonder if he was right. Can we handle the truth? That search for Truth is pretty much what we are focusing on today on this Reformation Sunday.

### **John 8:31-36**

But, as Pontius Pilate asked at Jesus’ inquisition, “What is truth?” Things are so confusing right now with accusations of “fake news” and

our government officials constantly being “fact-checked” for misinformation; what is truth? Jesus seems to be confusing the issue when he’s talking to Judaeans who are his followers when he said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” But, the response of those followers is confusing, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” Every time I preach on this passage, I wonder how they could say this when supposedly they’re celebrating Sukkot, the Festival of Tabernacles or tents, remembering when they wandered in the wilderness and lived in tents after their enslavement in Egypt. But, many commentaries point out that they understand that Jesus is talking about spiritual freedom. They know that they’re living under Roman bondage but they are spiritually free because they know that God is their king, not Caesar. But, some of them turned against Jesus and are among the crowd when Pontius Pilate asked, “What shall I do with this King of the Jews,” and they answered, “We have no king but Caesar! Crucify him!” Well, so much for their spiritual freedom... It somehow got lost in their politics. But, maybe we’re no different. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”?

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

What is the truth that Jesus is talking about? And, if we knew, could we handle that truth? Maybe that’s what our lesson from Jeremiah is revealing. Historically, remember that the Northern Kingdom had fallen and our lesson is written after Jerusalem has been destroyed and taken over by the Babylonians. Today’s lesson is in a section of the prophecy called “the book of consolation” in which Jeremiah is speaks a word of hope in a time of devastation and confusion, “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors... a covenant that they broke... But 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... for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” What does this have to do with truth? How can this make us free? If this is truth, I can handle it.

God forgives us. That's what I tell you every week. That's why we take Communion every week because it reminds us that God has forgiven us. That's a truth I can handle.

### **Romans 3:19-28**

But, what if forgiveness isn't the truth that Jesus was talking about? Paul seems to understand the truth that Jesus refers to. Paul seems to be going backwards when he talks about the law, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law... and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law..." In other words, Paul is saying that no human being can be perfect enough to measure up to God's standards of perfection. That's why he states in verse 23, "For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." That is the truth that sets us free: no one is perfect. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. What?!? Everyone's a sinner? No one's perfect? How is that a truth that makes us free? Then, Paul tells us, "...since all have sinned... they are now justified by (God's) grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." We don't have to do anything! God has done it all! But, wait a minute, that means what I taught in Confirmation was wrong. The Confirmation textbooks always said that, to receive God's forgiveness, it requires us to show an expression of sorrow, the intention to make amends, a promise not to repeat the offense, and willingness to do penance. Paul says that not grace. That's not free! But, God's grace is free. We don't have to do anything! God did it all! PERIOD!!! BUT, we know we have sinned because we're not perfect; yet, God still loves us and forgives us. We should be so thankful for God's free gift that we change our lives to show we are sorry and try to make amends and try not to repeat our sins and confess that we have sinned against God and to others. That's why in the Lutheran tradition we admit to God and each other that we have sinned and cannot free ourselves at the beginning of worship in our Confession. That's why I say every week that God promises that God forgives all our sins (ALL!). The truth that sets us free is that we are all sinners and God forgives us and we don't have to do a thing. As Paul said in our lesson, we are reconciled to God and we are justified by

God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith... For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law." That's the truth that makes us free!

### **Psalm 46, The Call and the Challenge**

We observe the protestant reformation today because Martin Luther discovered this truth that made him free when he was working on his commentary on Romans. Although David didn't write Psalm 46, Luther may have seen the parallels in David's struggles with the king David loved and in Luther's own struggles with the his beloved church. As a result, Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" which has become the anthem for the Lutheran Reformation. You can hear the hymn echoed in the words of the psalm: (The psalm) God is our refuge and strength,,, (Luther) A mighty fortress is our God; (The psalm) a very present help in trouble... (Luther) a bulwark never failing; (The psalm) though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea... God shall help it at the break of the day... (Luther) our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing; (Psalm) The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks, and the earth melts away... (Luther) And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us; (Psalm) The Lord of hosts is with us... Come now, regard the works of the Lord... behold the one who makes wars to cease in all the world... Be still, then, and know that I am God! ...I will be exalted in the earth... (Luther) That Word above all earthly powers ... the Spirit and the gifts are ours... God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever! So, again, the psalm says "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..." and Luther echoes "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing!" God loves us so much and God is with us. Because we have a confidence that God in Christ has entered our human story, God's people rise and shine to bring freedom, light and life and healing. God's people celebrate with banners high unfurling and with songs and prayers against the darkness hurling. So, rise, shine, God's people as we sing our hymn (ELW 665, Rise, Shine, You People!).