

Jeremiah 31

³¹ The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² It won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ They will no longer need to teach each other to say, "Know the Lord!" because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a help always near in times of great trouble.
² That's why we won't be afraid when the world falls apart,
when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea,
³ when its waters roar and rage,
when the mountains shake because of its surging waves. *Selah*
⁴ There is a river whose streams gladden God's city,
the holiest dwelling of the Most High.
⁵ God is in that city. It will never crumble.
God will help it when morning dawns.
⁶ Nations roar; kingdoms crumble.
God utters his voice; the earth melts.
⁷ The Lord of heavenly forces is with us!
The God of Jacob is our place of safety. *Selah*
⁸ Come, see the Lord's deeds,
what devastation he has imposed on the earth—
⁹ bringing wars to an end in every corner of the world,
breaking the bow and shattering the spear,
burning chariots with fire.
¹⁰ "That's enough! Now know that I am God!
I am exalted among all nations; I am exalted throughout the world!"
¹¹ The Lord of heavenly forces is with us!
The God of Jacob is our place of safety. *Selah*

Romans 3

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, in order to shut every mouth and make it so the whole world has to answer to God. ²⁰ It follows that no human being will be treated as righteous in his presence by doing what the Law says, because the knowledge of sin comes through the Law. God's righteousness through faithfulness of Christ.

²¹ But now God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. ²² God's righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There's no distinction. ²³ All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, ²⁴ but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace

because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, ²⁶ during the time of God's patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.

²⁷ What happens to our bragging? It's thrown out. With which law? With what we have accomplished under the Law? ²⁸ No, not at all, but through the law of faith. We consider that a person is treated as righteous by faith, apart from what is accomplished under the Law.

John 8

³¹ Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teaching. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They responded, "We are Abraham's children; we've never been anyone's slaves. How can you say that we will be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus answered, "I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ A slave isn't a permanent member of the household, but a son is. ³⁶ Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you really will be free.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

I know, I know. It's quite dangerous to have biblical passages on freedom this close to a presidential election. Blame the lectionary! It's dangerous because, with only ten days left until the election, someone might once again hijack the theological integrity of freedom for their own political purposes, the same way that they've hijacked commercials, cable news, and the internet. Not that we've ever seen politicians pandering to religious people to garner a few extra votes.

However – and this is a significant however – this doesn't mean there are no political consequences from our theological convictions. Our theology absolutely should inform our politics. If God created everything that is, that means that our belief in God should affect how we think

about politics and education and entertainment and recreation and healthcare and fashion and art and a host of other things. Our life of faith should permeate our entire lives. So, let me assuage some concerns and give you some new ones instead. None of this gives me license to tell you who to vote for. That's not helpful. But it does give me a responsibility to tell you that this God-given freedom means something absolutely transformative, that this freedom changes everything about our lives, or at least it should.

Luther understood the seismic shift wrought by the freedom God brings. In his book, On Christian Liberty, Luther gave us this wonderful little dichotomy. "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all."

Apparently, the nature of Christian freedom is complex, which might be the understatement of the year. Yet, despite that complexity, we've somehow simplified our

understanding of freedom it to the point of not knowing what Christian freedom truly is. “I’ll do whatever I want” isn’t actually freedom.

The most helpful distinction, I think, is the difference between freedom **from** something, freedom **of** something, and freedom **for** something. Freedom from something is perhaps the simplest to understand. If you were imprisoned and then released from jail, then you are free from prison. Freedom from is the kind freedom that means we’re no longer bound to something.

Freedom of is the kind of freedom we’re used to when watching On Demand television. You have the freedom of choice to watch anything you want at any point you want to watch it. Freedom of builds on freedom from with the added dimension of choice. They’re not the same because it’s possible for you to be free from something and not necessarily choose to leave it.

Freedom for, though, is an entirely different animal. Freedom from and freedom of are allowances, permissions, that promise no repercussions for exercising those freedoms. Freedom for, though, is liberation with a purpose. When you're free for something, you're not just freed from chains to something else, though that's included. It's not even just that we have the freedom of choice, though that's also related. Freedom for is the kind of theologically intentional language that reminds us we're meant for something. You're meant for something. When God frees us, that freedom is not disinterested. Instead, as Jesus begins this passage, he reminds us that we're freed for "faithfulness to his teaching."

That's why Luther tells us that Christian freedom means we're perfectly dutiful servants, "subject of all, subject to all." As Christians, we're freed from the bondage of sin, we're free to follow God, but most of all, we're freed for

servanthood. That's freedom for a Christian. Servanthood is the fundamental content in Jesus's teaching, and it's from him that we receive our freedom. Dr. Gilberto Ruiz, writing nearly 500 years after Luther, comes to a similar conclusion about Christian liberation: "freedom does not mean that one is free to do what one wants...Rather, freedom means to be bound to a relationship with God."

On this Reformation Sunday, 499 years after Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral, we're still working to live into our reformation identities. At our core, we're a church of the reformation that's still in the process of reformation. Perhaps this area of freedom is an obvious example. We still need a reformation to truly embrace this kind of freedom and trust what it means for our lives. We believe that we're free from things to a certain degree. Free from the consequences of sin. Free from the devil's power. And we surely believe we're

free to do whatever we want to do. We've latched on to that part of the American political project without really questioning the consequences. But do we truly believe we're freed by Christ for a purpose of servanthood in the world? We are. This is most certainly true. But it rarely seems like we live that way. We need reformation, specifically reformation in the image of Jesus.

That's one of the reasons I picked up on a former mentor's language from years ago and talk about looking, living, and loving more like Jesus. Jesus lived a life that is free for others. That purpose constitutes his very being. Think about when you say someone is Christ-like. What does that mean? Selfless. Self-sacrificial. Focuses on others. Giving. To look, live, and love more like Jesus is to embrace our freedom for service.

Recently, I was talking with a college student who'd been studying in the major for nearly three years, was good

at it, and had already had job interviews indicating they'd find work rather quickly. But, in the midst of their college career, they began to wonder why they were doing what they were doing, and they've begun to consider changing majors. They weren't sure of their purpose in pursuing a degree and that called everything else into question.

Purpose is important because, without it, even the stuff that we're good at doesn't feel worth doing.

Purpose gives meaningful shape to freedom. Freedom from bondage is categorically a good thing. Freedom to choose is a blessing. But without a purpose, without a vision, without life abundant, freedom is limited. That's why liberation in Jesus is so functionally different than concepts of American freedom. Freedom in Jesus is not simply freedom of choice because Jesus reminds us that there's purpose in our choices, that we're called to a life of servanthood in the image of Jesus, who served and suffered

for us. Freedom in Jesus is not simply freedom from chains, for Jesus turns us from isolation into community, turns us from punishment to purpose.

The life of Christ is the life of the servant, and the life of a servant is life in community. You cannot serve if you are alone. We're not freed for isolation, whether in body or in our choices. That's the ultimate danger of freedom from and freedom to. Freedom from, without purpose, can still leave us all on our own in life. Freedom of can still leave us making all sorts of decisions without the input of others. But the kind of freedom that Jesus instills within us, the freedom for others, freedom for love, freedom for justice, freedom for wonder and trust and celebration. That's the kind of freedom we find in Jesus. If the Son sets us free, then surely we are free! Indeed we are free. Free for servanthood. We are free for reformation.

Yes, we are free for reformation. Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil, setting us free from their oppressive snares, freeing us to live abundant life. Now, we're free for reformation, which means we're free for service, to be reformed into God's image. We're free to help transform the world in which we live so others might experience that freedom. That's the Jesus-shaped reality of freedom, that it's meant for community, for relationships. Christian freedom is freedom for sharing with others.

I can't promise you that everyone will appreciate this freedom. Our culture's built on the assumption that we're allowed to do pretty much anything. But Christian freedom is a different kind of freedom, a category unto itself.

Christian freedom says, sure, you're free from chains. Sure, you're even free to choose. But you're free for something, so there's consequences to your freedom. Your freedom binds you to Jesus Christ. Christian freedom isn't Pinocchio's

freedom, dancing around with no strings attached.

Christian freedom means you're now tied to God instead of tied to sin. You're tied to someone that wants you free rather than something that wants to force your obedience.

Hear that. God wants your freedom enough to give it to you, and the giving of that gift actually binds us to God. It's a dissonant dichotomy, that in our freedom we're bound to something else, but that's the very nature of being free for something. The freedom that God accomplishes for us is a freedom that actually restores responsibility within us. We're free from sin and free for God's purposes, God's kingdom, God's delight. That law of love is written on our hearts, freeing us to become who God meant us to be. We're free for our God-given identity.

There's responsibility in that kind of freedom. There's consequences. It should change everything about politics and education and entertainment and recreation and

healthcare and fashion and art and a host of other things, and in fact every other thing.

That's the trajectory of reformation. Being made into God's image, the little Christs that walk the world with God's words in our mouths, God's spirit in our lungs, and God's actions in our bodies. That's a freedom worth living. That's the kind of reform that makes a world of difference. Thanks be to God, who served the world in Jesus, for freeing us to also live that servanthood, for inviting us to be a reformation people, always reforming in the image of God. Amen.