

Reformation 2017 "Re-formation?"

Text: Romans 3:19-28

On this special Sunday before Reformation, may the gifts of truth and clarity restored to God's Church through the Reformation fill your hearts with joy and thanksgiving; and may the three pillars of that Reformation – faith alone, grace alone, and Scripture alone – serve to ever support and strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ as your one and only Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Heirs of the Reformation:

"Change or die" is, we're told, a common mantra in the world of business. History is full of examples of even huge multinational corporations that failed to adapt to changing conditions and stubbornly rode their obsolete products or business models into obscurity. Think Eastman Kodak and Blockbuster Video. Companies that fail to recognize, accept, and adapt to changing times and needs invariably cease to exist. The key, so they claim, is not only to look to the present but to the future, to identify changing needs, and to find a way to supply those changing needs.

While the evidence that "change or die" applies in the business world, the question we need to ask is does it also apply to the Church? More specifically, what does this tell *us*, here today, as we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and our own church heritage? There are many really smart people out there that tell us that the same fate will befall us if we do not adapt to the changing needs of our society – if we do not continually re-form ourselves to adapt our "product" to changing "market conditions." We are told, for example, that just as the days of brick and mortar retail stores are numbered, so too brick and mortar churches will also become a thing of the past – *unless we find a way to accept the trend and adapt*. Obviously these dire predictions raise questions that need to be addressed. As we look back at 500 years of Lutheran heritage, we need to ask if we too are living in the past – to the detriment of the future. If it is true in business that an entity must change with the times or die, is it also true in the Christian Church?

These are the sorts of questions we will explore this morning. The stakes could not be higher. While the failure of a company might be a shame, the failure of Christianity today is disastrously unacceptable by any measure. The good news is that you and I don't need to make these decisions without divine intervention. We have God's Word as our sure and certain guide in all things. Again then we turn to that Word of God, and the text

that will guide our answers this morning are Paul's timeless words of truth found in the Third Chapter of his Letter to the Romans:

^{ESV} **Romans 3:19-28** *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ ¶ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ ¶ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

These are the very words of our God, written and preserved down through the centuries for our instruction and growth – also on this Reformation Sunday. That each one of us, personally, might be both strengthened in the present and guided in the future, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

The Reformation changed the world. Even the secular media gets that. On this 500th Anniversary even the godless world around us is taking time to examine the cause and effect of the Reformation. They are for the most part (not surprisingly) getting it all wrong, but at least they are taking notice. For the record, the idea that the Reformation was all about behavior modification, humanism, or political intrigue (rather than the restoration of the truth of the gospel) is like coming to the conclusion that pro-life activists are really just upset about the color of the paint on the outside of abortion facilities.

The Reformation was not about personal conduct. It was about souls spending eternity in hell because the only thing that could give them Life – the gospel – was being withheld from them.

That was then, this is now. Is this 500-year-old Reformation still relevant or important to you today? Let's find out with a series of

questions. Do you today know what the gospel really is? Do you know what it is *not*? Do you know that we have been *justified* (declared not guilty) by God the Father for no other reason than that Jesus Christ, his Son, gave his perfect life as the payment for the sins of the entire world? Do you know that no part of salvation is or can be earned by your good works? Do you know that sinful mankind, having sinned even once, has absolutely nothing to offer to a holy God in payment for that or any other sin? Do you know that it is both useless and sinful to pray to Mary or any of the other saints, that the Pope in Rome is not infallible, that there is no such thing as purgatory, and that prayers and masses for the dead are useless?

*You do indeed know these things, and that is what the Reformation was all about. The fact that you know these Bible truths makes you a direct beneficiary of the Reformation. Knowing makes you an heir. Prior to the Reformation, few knew these truths. Worse still, God's Word was withheld from sinners so they had no means by which they could learn the truth. Obviously "change or die" applied to the church in Luther's day, and you and I are present-day beneficiaries of the critical *change* that God brought about through the Reformation.*

Yet the question still remains: Is it in fact true that Christianity *today* must "change or die"?

Understand, first of all, that the question is not "Do individual Christians need to change?" Of course we do. Even those who have already been brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ need change in their lives *because of the gradual degradation that tends to creep into the life of every Christian*. Most of the time it's not so much "change" as "change back." You yourselves know that to be true. I'm guessing there is no one here today who hasn't experienced a time when your faith and conduct have deteriorated. Maybe you never lost altogether your Christian faith, but at times you have learned to tolerate sin, to love this world more than you should, and to grow cold and loveless as you amass treasures for none but yourself. Many of you know what it is like to question or doubt some of the things that God tells us in his Word. In fact it is often only after some time has passed (and perhaps when someone pointed out the problem to you) that you came to recognize just how great the slide and therefore how dire the need for positive change. This sort of need for change Christians tend to readily acknowledge. Yet the greater danger is the ever-present pressure to change that which we cannot, and to innovate or adapt where we have no right to do so. The key is knowing the difference, and here is where God's Word again makes all the difference.

The world would have us believe that we need to find both a new product and a more effective way to market that product. Many Christian churches have now bought into this idea. Since society no longer seems to want doctrine (law and gospel) we need to give them what they want. Those new products include things like social gospel, food pantries, social justice, entertainment, and unconditional love and support for sinful lifestyles.

I pray the problem with that is painfully obvious to everyone here this morning: We don't get to decide what our product is; God does. God did. In his Great Commission, Jesus himself laid out our "business model": **Mark 16:15-16** ***"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** Again in Matthew 28 Jesus first established his right to dictate such things by saying, ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*** He then went on: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*** Notice that our Lord didn't burden us with the task of trying to figure out what we should and shouldn't present to the world. He told us simply to ***"teach them to observe all that he has commanded us."*** In fact the last verses of the Bible offer this dire warning to all who would even attempt to alter what he told us in any way: (Revelation 22:18-19) ***"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."***

The bottom line then is that we not only *shouldn't* look for a new product or message, *we cannot*. The God that we seek to serve has forever established our life's work. We are to share his messages of law and gospel with the world. That will never – *can never* – change.

Eastman Kodak Corporation failed because the world no longer wanted their one product: film cameras. They were replaced by something infinitely better and cheaper: digital photography. Blockbuster failed because DVDs were replaced by streaming content. Yet even universal rejection of the Christian faith will not make render what we have to offer either obsolete or unnecessary. There simply *is nothing better*. Our text makes that clear from the very start: ***Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and***

the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ ***For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*** This speaks not only to God's view of the law but to the lack of any substitute and to the utter foolishness of trying to repurpose the law. God's law, his unchanging standard of what is right and what is wrong, can only serve one purpose: to condemn, never to save. Yet this is *exactly* what modern Christianity now advocates with its new business model of social gospel and tolerance. They teach that the law should not be used to condemn but to save. Feed the poor, don't condemn anything as sinful, and God will both love you and reward you with heaven.

Our text also spelled out for us God's definition and intended use of the gospel: ***"(Human beings) are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... to be received by faith. (God is) the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*** ²⁷ ¶ ***Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.*** ²⁸ ***For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.***

The greatest gift that God gave to mankind through the Reformation is nothing less than the return of the truth of how any human being can escape hell and enter God's heaven. We cannot earn this by our works; it is God's undeserved gift to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Is there nothing then that we ever need to change or re-form? Of course, but *never the message itself*, only the presentation of that message. God in his Word has given us tremendous freedom on how that message is shared *for this very reason*. The key is to struggle continually to present God's truths of law and gospel as clearly and as understandably as humanly possible. That means that our manner of expression can change, but not the message. It means that our liturgy (order of service) can change, but never the object of our worship or the good order that our God demands. That means that we are to continue to reach out to every single human being with God's law and gospel, but that the means or the words that convey those timeless truths can and should adapt as situations warrant.

Recognize then, on this 500th Anniversary, how you personally have benefitted from God's Reformation – and thank him for it. You now not only *know* the one path to eternal life, you are on it. Ask your God not only to preserve you on that path, but for the wisdom and courage to communicate his saving truths to all who will hear. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Revelation 14:6-7** Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:12-19** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁶ ¶ "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

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Reformation Sunday –October 29, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 266 (Red Hymnal)

"O God, Our Lord, Thy Holy Word"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Revelation 14:6-7) Our first lesson on this Reformation Sunday is included because many Bible scholars believe that it represents a prophecy of Martin Luther and the Reformation. While God could well have had this in mind when he verbally inspired these words through the Apostle John, this cannot be verified from Holy Scripture. The fact remains that it is God himself who provides messengers to proclaim his gospel truth. God has in fact called each one of us to that very work.

The Second Lesson: (Matthew 11:12-19) In our second reading Jesus condemns the unbelievers for their rejection of God's Word. In Jesus' day they rejected John the Baptist, together with his message, because he was too stern and unyielding. They then condemned Jesus and his teachings as one who was too permissive and lax in his conduct and discipline. The fact is unbelievers always find a reason to reject the Word and will of their Savior God. Learn to recognize this temptation in your own life.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 267 (Red Hymnal)

"If God Had Not Been on Our Side"

The Sermon - Text: Romans 3:19-28 (Printed on the back page)

"Re-formation?"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 262 (Red Hymnal)

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 261 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Keep Us Steadfast In Thy Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (37) Average (42) September Mortgage Balance (\$33,453)

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-5:00 p.m.	– Joint Reformation Service in Bowdle
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Bowdle
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Andrew Schaller is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Church Council Notes – The Church Council met on October 22 – all members present. Mr. David Payne was accepted into communicant membership by transfer from Prince of Peace of Hecla. Treasurer Adams reported that YTD offerings are \$2,028 less than budgeted needs. The annual audit has been completed by Keith Mantz and Mick Johnson. Copies are available from Pres. Johnson. The Council will look for a volunteer to take over the formulation of the annual Usher/Cleaning schedule. The annual Church Christmas party is scheduled for December 2nd. The Council agreed in principle with a member suggestion that we consider monthly VBS-type youth events throughout the year. The idea will be further developed. Our annual Thanksgiving service is scheduled for Wednesday, November 22, followed by three midweek Advent services. The Annual Voters' Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, December 17 and the next Council meeting for November 19.

Joint Reformation Service – The annual Dakota Area Joint Reformation service is schedule for this afternoon in Bowdle at 5pm. A fellowship meal will follow. Please check with the Pastor to coordinate rides. Those planning to attend are invited to bring a dessert to pass.

The Power of God's Word

A Responsive Reading of Confession and Absolution

Adapted from Hebrews 4:12-13, Isaiah 55:7-11, Isaiah 1:18, and 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Pastor: The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow,

People: And is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Pastor: There is no creature hidden from His sight,

People: But all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Pastor: We have done wickedly, but we wish to forsake that way,

People: We have been unrighteous, but we wish to forsake such thoughts;

Pastor: We would turn to the LORD, for He will have mercy on us;

People: And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Pastor: For His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways.

People: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, And His thoughts than our thoughts.

Pastor: For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there,

People: But water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

Pastor: So shall God's Word be that goes forth from His mouth; it does not return to Him void, but it accomplishes what He pleases,

People: And it prospers in the thing for which He sends it.

Pastor: Having confessed your sins, hear now the Word of our Lord's forgiveness: "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." Because of Christ Jesus' death in your place, your sins are forgiven. Because of His resurrection, you too shall rise to glory, as God's free gift in Christ.

People: Thanks be to God!

Pastor: God grant that we continue in the things which we have learned and been assured of,

People: Knowing from whom we have learned them,

Pastor: And that from childhood we have known the Holy Scriptures,

People: Which are able to make us wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Pastor: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,

People: And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

Pastor: That the man of God may be complete,

People: Thoroughly equipped for every good work. Amen.