

Reformation 2025

"Listen, and Live"

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 strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ as your one and only Savior and Lord. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Listening is a learned skill. For most, it does not come naturally. Everyone wants to talk, to express, to complain. Listening is so much less fun. In case you don't have quite enough frustration in your life at present, tune in to pretty much any program that features any sort of "discussion" and you will find lots of talking and very little listening. The participants talk over, talk past, and talk louder, but they seldom seem to listen. They never seem to *hear*. The reason is pretty simple: Talking is all about me; listening is all about you, and human pride will always choose "me" over "you."

One of the more obvious negatives here is that no one ever learns or grows by talking, only by listening. By definition, we can only talk about what we already know, or think we know. We learn and grow by listening to what others have learned.

The obvious solution is listening, but pride tells me it's always the *other guy* who needs to listen. In your life have you ever met anyone who thinks he or she is wrong before they start listening? You haven't, because everyone believes they are right or they wouldn't hold to their views or positions. Since everyone is "right," everyone naturally believes their job is to convince the other guy to listen, and to thereby learn how wrong he is. And it seems to be getting worse. The citizens of this country are more divided now than perhaps at any time in our nation's history. We have always had disagreements on key issues, but now we seem to be divided on just about everything. Why is that?

The answer has to do with the solution. When two parties disagree, the solution that actually works is to allow a higher authority to arbitrate – to allow an authoritative outside source to *listen* to both sides and then to decide the matter. That ultimate "higher authority" used to be God,

speaking to us in his Word, but Satan has cleverly undermined the authority of God's Word to the point where the Bible has been demoted to just another opinion that can be ignored or manipulated at will.

What this teaches us, in part, is that the truths returned to the Christian Church through God's Reformation are still desperately needed today. Those truths not only need to be preserved among us, they need to be passed on to our children, and the only way our children can gain a deep and abiding sense of the importance of their Christian faith and heritage is through the example of parents who value God's Word above all other things in life. One of the three pillars or mottos of the Reformation was, *is*, "sola Scriptura" – Scripture alone. Rejection of that simple truth guarantees that the divide will only widen until our Lord calls a halt to this mess that we've made.

This is why we struggle so hard to preserve the truths returned to God's Church through the Reformation. They are timelessly applicable and always desperately needed. In keeping then with that Reformation motto "Scripture alone," we now seek not to talk but to *listen to God's Word* and there to seek wisdom, comfort, strength, and guidance. Our text is that classic Reformation text found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Third Chapter:

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.

This is God's Word. Asking that these words might continue to fill us, instruct us, and save us, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

Martin Luther's first and greatest misconception in the early stages of the Reformation was that he was convinced that the leaders of the Church of the 16th century were simply ignorant of what was going on all around them. He was convinced that all he had to do to turn things around was to start the discussion and all would certainly listen, bow to Scripture, and agree to the needed changes. He would talk, and they would listen. At the outset he had no idea how wrong he really was. Those on the other side of the fence were not lambs in sheep's clothing, they were wolves. They were not only fully aware of damning lies that were being taught, they condoned and supported them. They enabled them.

Initially they did toss Luther a bone or two. They sought "common ground" that ignored the real problems and that was actually designed to make the whole question just go away. They would do so by condescendingly agreeing with Luther that something just had to be done about the personal debauchery of many of the religious leaders of the day. *"In this,"* they would grant, *"Luther is right."* It didn't take much of a theologian, however, to recognize that open and rampant drunkenness, gluttony, promiscuity, and materialism were bad things. *"Yes,"* they would agree, *"Those things were in dire need of reformation, and for that we owe a debt of thanks to Luther and his followers."* They missed the forest for the trees – or at least they so pretended. The idea that the Reformation was all about behavior modification was like saying the US declared war on Japan in 1941 because we didn't like sushi.

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.

Allow me to ask you a series of questions to prove a point. 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 earned by our 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? Do you know that the Pope in Rome is not infallible? Do you know 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 makes you a direct beneficiary of the Reformation. An heir. These lies were all taught in the Church of Luther's day. These things are all still taught by many false teachers today. And the lies are not diminishing; they are spreading.

The solution? First, stop talking.

That is, in fact, exactly why God gave us the Law – why he spelled it out so carefully and in such intricate detail. Our text articulated the "stop talking" part with these words: ***"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."***

This is God himself, from heaven, holding up his hand and saying: *"Stop talking, right now, and listen! Just listen!"* To what was mankind supposed to listen? What were we supposed to hear? Our text tells us: ***"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."***

Many of our fellow citizens would probably be shocked to learn that God really doesn't care what you think. More to the point, what man thinks really has no bearing on what is and is not true. Man *thinking* that he can earn God's favor doesn't make it so. Man *thinking* that he can make up for his sins by being good doesn't give him the power or ability to do so. Man *thinking* that he can talk God into or out of his opinion doesn't mean that he can actually do so.

In fact the first message of our text is dire indeed: *"If you don't stop talking and listen, you will spend eternity in the everlasting torment of hell."* That is, in fact, exactly why God gave us the law – to teach us to shut our mouths long enough to learn just exactly what our chances are of saving ourselves. If we are always too busy *talking* about our own fictitious goodness, we will never actually *hear* the truth of just how sinful and unworthy we are in God's sight.

While that much is true, that is not God's ultimate goal here, is it? Far from it. His goal is not to destroy but to save. His goal in giving us the law is to shut our mouths so that we might finally hear the truth of how we cannot save ourselves, but how we can *be saved* – how we can *be rescued*.

So with mouths closed and ears open, our text continues with words that truly have no equal: ***"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."***

Those who truly *listen* to these magnificent words will understand that there are two opposing views regarding how a sinner gets to heaven. Either Jesus earned complete forgiveness for sins for all, or we must earn it ourselves. You listened. You be the judge. What do these words clearly teach us? Which of the two opposing positions do these words proclaim as God's truth? Both obviously cannot be true. One is right and the other wrong. One leads to life and must be promoted, the other leads to eternal torment and must therefore be vigorously denied, refuted, and condemned.

By God's grace you know the answer. You have *heard* and, what is more, by the gift of the Holy Spirit working in your heart *you have believed*. You know that man does not and cannot make up for what he has done wrong. You know that that is exactly why God sent his Son into the world to keep the law for us – because we simply could not provide what was necessary on our own. You know, in the words of our text, that ***"(God himself is) the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."*** You know therefore that God has declared you also to be not guilty of sin because Jesus himself has paid for all that you have or ever will do wrong.

And then, just in case there was any doubt, God secured this truth by closing also the back door. If man had done or could do anything at all toward winning his salvation, then man would have something to brag about. So also God the Holy Spirit ended our text with these words: ***"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."***

So our God calls to us from eternity. He closes our mouths with his law, and then opens our ears and our hearts with his gospel. Could there be any better information to hear, to learn? Could there be any more vital information than how we can escape hell and gain heaven?

God grant to each of us, on this Reformation Sunday, a renewed appreciation for what he restored to us through the Reformation – the very truth of salvation. And now that we have listened and learned, now is the time to talk, to share the message of salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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 **John 8:31-36** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" ³⁴ ¶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

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Reformation Sunday – October 26, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 683

"O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff.

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

The First Lesson: (Revelation 14:6-7) Protestant theologians widely consider this reading to be a reference to the coming of a special messenger sent from God – most typically a reference to Martin Luther. While this is certainly possible, we need to exercise caution in definitively assigning any prophecy to a specific individual unless Scripture itself does so. One thing we know to be true concerning this reading: God will always provide his people with a clear, sure witness.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 87)

The Second Lesson: (John 8:31-36) Our second Scripture reading ought to remind us that the truths regained through the Reformation need to become the personal possession of each successive generation. The Jews believed they would be saved because of their blood line. As Jesus disabused them of that silly notion, so he would remind us this morning that each individual must stand before God. Though we have inherited the Reformation, that fact should never be allowed to give us a false sense of comfort or entitlement. The just shall live by faith alone, not history.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 686

"Preserve Your Word, O Savior"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 3:19-28 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Listen, and Live"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 673

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Blue Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Blue Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 682

"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting and Baby Shower
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
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.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Aaron Ude is considering the call to Trinity of Spokane. Pastor David Pfeiffer has returned the call to Living Word of Appleton, WI. Prof. Mark Weiss has returned the part-time call to Our Redeemer's of Red Wing, MN. Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld has returned the call to Peace Thru Christ of Middleton, WI. That congregation has now called Pastor Michael Gurath. ILC is calling for nominations for both an open teaching position and for ILC President. See Pastor Roehl for details.

Flower Pots – We are looking for two heavy, stable pots for the flowers at the church entrance doors.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning.

Poinsettia Order – Please consult the sheet on the mailbox table if you would like to order Christmas flowers. See Sandy Roehl if you have questions.