Reformation 2026
"The Unchanging Word of Truth"
Text: Romans 3:19-28

On this Reformation Sunday, may the gifts of life-saving truth and clarity restored to God's Church through the Reformation fill your hearts with thanksgiving and confidence; 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, ask anyone 25 years or older what a "Kodak" is, and without hesitation they will tell you that it's a camera. If there is any hesitation at all, it's only because they imagine that it's some sort of trick question, the answer would be that obvious. Just as you occasionally hear older folks talking about *"making a Xerox"* instead of *"making a photocopy"* (because Xerox invented photocopying in 1959 and was the only show in town for so many years) and sitting on the davenport instead of the couch (because the first ones were made by A. H. Davenport) so also for decades people would use "Kodak" and "camera" almost interchangeably. Most of you will remember the ubiquitous *"Kodak moment."*

The very name "Kodak," by the way, was not someone's name. It was a made-up word. Evidently George Eastman – the founder of Eastman Kodak – liked the letter "K," believing it to be "strong and incisive." The man who invented rolled film was actually a Red River Valley inventor/farmer living in Hunter, ND named David Houston. He worked with Eastman and suggested "Nodak" as the name for his new company and camera. Eastman added one of his beloved K's to the beginning, Nodak became Kodak, and what would soon become a household name was born.

Yet it is no longer a household name, is it? Young people today don't even know what a Kodak is. In fact since 2012, the company that in 1888 actually *invented* the film camera and the rolled film that went into it no longer makes either. Understand the significance of this. At one point Eastman Kodak was one of the undisputed powerhouses of American Industry – 74 years on the Dow Jones Industrial Index. At their height they accounted for 90% of all film sales and 85% of all camera sales. Yet in January of 2012 Eastman Kodak declared bankruptcy.

What happened? It would be an oversimplification to say simply that *"the company looked backwards instead of forwards"* or that *"they rested on their laurels - their past phenomenal success – and failed to innovate, adapt, and change."* Kodak had adopted the "razor and blades" philosophy of selling cheap cameras that required expensive film. When the need for film went away, so did Eastman Kodak. Yet it goes deeper than that. They actually did try to branch out and innovate. In fact they were one of the biggest manufacturers of hand-grenades during World War II, and one of their own workers actually *invented* digital photography. It wasn't that they failed to change and adapt, it was that they chose poorly.

What does all of this have to do with us here today as we celebrate the Reformation and our own church heritage? It raises questions that need to be addressed. As we look back, we need to determine whether or not 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? Or will such change or innovation itself cause our demise?

These are the questions we 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 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.

This is God's Word, 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 in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

It is a mistake to imagine that the celebration of the Reformation is the celebration of a man – Martin Luther. Martin Luther was certainly profoundly gifted and objectively brilliant, dedicated, and courageous, but Luther didn't return the clarity of the gospel to Christendom, God did. Martin Luther didn't remove the devil's foot from the neck of the Church, God did. Martin Luther didn't thereby change the course of human history, God did.

Historians still today routinely and inexplicably miss the point of the Reformation. The opinions on just what the Reformation was all about are about as varied as the number of authors that write about it. A significant number believe that it was all about behavior modification – that Luther's main goal was to clean up the rampant debauchery of the priesthood of his day. The stench of the rampant debauchery of the Roman Catholic priesthood of Luther's day was just what led to the far more important discovery of the rot and decay that had permeated Christendom.

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. Perhaps more specifically, it was the mixing or confusion of law and gospel.

Some questions will illustrate. 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? Do you know 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 makes you a direct beneficiary or heir of the Reformation. The damning lies that were taught in the church of Luther's day were accepted as true by countless millions of blood-bought souls *because that was all that they were taught*. The Word of God was locked away – literally – and was replaced with lies that lead only to eternal destruction.

It is one of the great challenges of mankind not only to continue to treasure what we have learned to take for granted, but to realistically imagine what life would be like without the saving truths that God returned to his Church through the Reformation. Take some time to contemplate an existence where not only were you taught to believe that which would one day damn you to hell, but where you were also denied any means to learn the truth – where you were not allowed to read the Bible for yourself. Imagine an existence where you went to church every single Sunday, only to hear Latin phrases that you could not understand. The only words you *could* understand were your religious leaders telling you that you had to pay for every single one of your sins by providing you own good works. It is, or should be, absolutely terrifying to imagine an existence where you had access to nothing at all but the lies that would eventually condemn you to hell for all eternity. This is why we continue to celebrate that great gift we know as the Lutheran Reformation.

Through the Reformation, God returned to the world of lost sinners the precious truths by which we are saved; that is, he returned to us the basic truths of law and gospel.

I doubt anyone would deny that our lives today are filled with clutter – physical, emotional, and spiritual clutter. This morning, partly in honor of God's gift of the return of divine Truth through the Reformation but also because it represents the very heart or core of what we believe, we seek to clear away any and all clutter and to focus on the simple basic truths of the Christian faith. We would be hard pressed, as it turns out, to find a text that lays it out more simply or more beautifully than does our text for this morning.

Our text begins where, because of our sin, we must always begin – with the law: ***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.*** Note how the Holy Spirit here puts the law in its place. Not only is the law

unable to save us (***"by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight"***) the purpose or function of the law is the exact opposite: *the law shows us just how sinful we are and how impossible it is to save ourselves by our own works*. That's what it means that ***"through the law comes knowledge of sin."*** God's Law makes us aware of just how sinful we truly are, and therefore also how desperately we need to be rescued.

But our text doesn't end there. It cannot end there. The Law shows us our sin, it condemns, but it offers nothing by way of payment or satisfaction or positive change. That's why what comes next in our text represents the most precious message any human being could ever hear. What comes next is the revelation of the Great Mystery, the key that unlocks eternal life itself: ***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.*** To be clear, ***"the righteous of God"*** refers to the righteousness that God himself provides – the righteousness *from* God, *provided by* God. God does not justify the one who tries to pay his own sin-debt. He justifies (declares to be innocent) the one who believes that God himself provided our sin payment, who believes that Jesus has already paid that sin-debt for him. God therefore does not declare the one who "tries to do good" to be righteous and pure in his sight. God, according to our text, is ***"the justifier of <u>the one who has faith in Jesus</u>."***

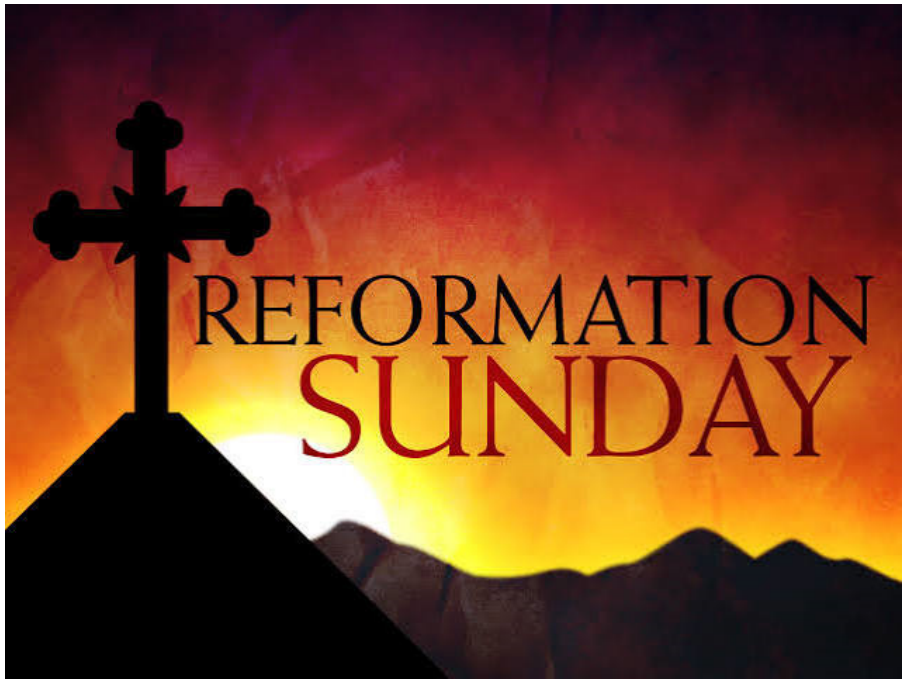
These are the very words through which God the Holy Spirit released Martin Luther from the terrible, hopeless, crippling bondage of work righteousness. When Luther was brought by the Holy Spirit to truly understand and believe these simple truths, he said it was as if an unbearable weight was lifted forever from his shoulders. Through the power of these words Luther came to understand that what he had fruitlessly struggled so hard to do for himself, God had already done *for* him through Jesus' suffering and death. It was then that the pure light of these words was poured into his heart: ***For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*** Martin Luther was freed from the devil's bondage the instant he came to believe that Jesus had already done what he never could.

May these also serve as the words of divine truth that lift forever from your shoulders the burden and guilt of your sin. Let them fill your heart with the joy of the salvation earned for you by your Savior Jesus. You cannot pay the awful debt of your sins, but Jesus already has. These are the truths that God again restored to his Church through the Reformation. Every single one of us rises or falls, lives or dies, based on his faith in, belief in, trust in, the timeless truth of Paul's magnificent words in our text: ***For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*** If all else is lost, and yet this remains, then all is still ours. 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 **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."

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.



St Paul Lutheran Church

Bismarck, North Dakota

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

Reformation Sunday – November 1, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 686
"Preserve Your Word, O Savior"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Revelation 14:6-7) Many Bible scholars believe that our first lesson on this Reformation Sunday is 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 Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 87)

The New Testament 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. We need to learn to recognize this temptation in our own lives.

The Confession of Faith -
The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 5)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 673
"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

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

"The Unchanging Word of Truth"

The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 680
"God of Grace and God of Glory"

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

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 682
"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your 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 churches and missions throughout the United States and 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 (30) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	**-9:00 a.m.**	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
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 with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – CLC News – Pastor Frank Gantt has returned the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the calls to Gift of God of Mapleton and St. Paul's of Ponsford, MN. Pastor Neal Radichel has returned the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ. Pastor Paul Krause has accepted the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit, MI.

Church Christmas Flowers – The annual poinsettia order is being prepared. Please see the signup sheet on the mailbox table. Today is the final day to place an order.

ILC Visitors Day – Immanuel Lutheran College Visitors Day is scheduled for Friday, November 13th. All high school juniors and seniors are invited to attend. Activities include visiting college classes and attending the fall theater production of *The Sound of Music.* See Pastor Roehl for more information.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour.

Used Cell Phones – There is an ongoing need for used cell phones in our overseas seminaries. See Pastor Roehl if you have an older cell phone you are no longer using and would like to donate.