

Reformation 2020

"Never Go Back to the Basics"

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 Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

If there is one thing at which high school in general excels, it is labeling (or "pigeon holing") every student. Complex individuals were and are all lumped into one of several different categories. The actual terms change over the years, but the categories are fairly constant. You were, for example, a nerd, a jock, a partier/stoner, a popular, a normal, or a loner. There are a few other categories (one comprehensive study suggested there are actually 11) but you get the picture. Categorizing complex human beings so simplistically is, of course, silly, but then again so is most of high school.

If you're like me, you passed through high school without ever being sure into which category you fit. I guess I would have been dumped into the "jock" category – but certainly not because of any extraordinary athletic prowess. In fact I bring this up this morning precisely because most of the teams I was on were rather profoundly sub-mediocre. My coaches would get frustrated about halfway through the season and announce that we "needed to go back to the basics." I always figured that the problem wasn't that we got away from the basics so much as we just didn't have much talent to begin with. Regardless, back to the basics we went, although I also don't recall that the outcome ever changed all that much by doing so.

I get the concept, of course. Your coach can't call for a bunt if you don't know how to bunt. You can't run a play in basketball if you don't know how to dribble. You can't stop the opposing team from scoring if you forget how to tackle. "Back to the basics" works in that sort of context, but it is an indication of a far greater problem in others. One of those areas is the Christian faith in general, and this morning the Reformation in particular.

This is the theme we explore this morning – the rather odd-sounding concept that Christians must "*Never go back to the Basics.*" The text that will guide us in our study 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 hereby 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 greatest and most common problem with most celebrations of the Reformation is that they focus on a man – Martin Luther – instead of on the God who accomplished all. 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 history, God did.

Historians still today routinely and inexplicably miss the whole 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 seem to think 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 idea that the Reformation was all about behavior modification, rather than false and damning doctrine, is like decrying the drab color of a bottle of cyanide, rather than what's inside it.

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.

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. All of these lies were all taught in the church of Luther's day, and they were accepted as true by countless millions of blood-bought souls *because that is 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 in the days leading up to Reformation to contemplate an existence where not only were you taught to believe that which would one day damn you to hell, but you were also denied any means to learn the truth. 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 all of your sins by doing the good works that they were happy to prescribe for you. It is, or should be, absolutely terrifying to imagine an existence where you had access to nothing at all but the damning lies of the devil himself. 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.

Anyone who has ever been involved in a building or remodeling project knows how important it is to keep your workspace as clean and uncluttered as possible. That takes discipline, because it often seems more efficient and productive just to keep working around the mess than it does to take the time to clear it away. Most of you have probably also experienced the simple joy that comes when you finally do clear away the mess. Your footing is again firm and you can be less preoccupied with just moving about and more focused on what you are trying to do.

Much the same applies to our walk as Christians. Modern life is filled with clutter of every imaginable sort. And it's not just "stuff-clutter" – the material things that fill our worlds and drain us of so much time and energy. There's also religious, or spiritual, clutter. You've all experienced what I'm talking about here. Paul warned both Timothy and Titus to ***"avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless."*** While there is no part of God's Word that is worthless, or that is not worthy of study, there are countless pseudo-religious things that are. Even some of those that cannot be ignored are still allowed to consume an inordinate amount of our time and attention.

So it is this morning, partly in honor of God's gift of the return of the truth through the Reformation and partly 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 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.

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 are the words of 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 the one who has faith in Jesus."***

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.*** These are the basic truths by which we are saved, the simple and yet priceless truths that God restored to his Church through the Reformation.

But what then of the sermon title? How could it ever then be true that we must *"never go back to the basics"*? The key is in the word "back." We must never go *back* to the basics of the Christian faith because we must never leave them, never lose them, never allow them to be removed

from the highest place of honor and joy in our lives. God forever preserve us in these simple, basic, life-giving truths. 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 25, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 266 (Red Hymnal)

"O God, Our Lord, Thy Holy Word"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this 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.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33)

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 Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 774 (Brown Hymnal)

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

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

"Never Go Back to the Basics"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 305 (Stanzas 1&7) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 261 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy 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.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday school and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/communion |
| | -11:15 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 |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour |

CLC News – Johnathan Schnose (a pastor recently received by colloquy) has returned the resident vacancy calls to the dual parish of Bowdle and Ipswich and has accepted the call to Bethel of Morris. Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Pastor Aaron Ude. Nominations are currently being accepted to fill the upcoming vacancy on the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran College. Please see Pastor Roehl if you would like to nominate someone for this position. Teacher Ted Quade has announced his plan to retire following the current school year.

Usher/Cleaning List – The 2021 Usher & Cleaning list will soon be updated for presentation at the Annual Voters Meeting. Please let Secretary Phil Pfennig know of any changes that need to be made.

Christmas Flowers – The deadline is approaching for ordering Christmas flowers. There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table. Please see Sandy Roehl if you have any questions.