

"Shut Up, Listen, and Live"

Reformation 2019

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 needs to be placed on the official endangered species list. Everyone wants to talk, to express, to complain; no one wants to listen. In case you don't have quite enough frustration in your life at present, tune in sometime to pretty much any program that features any sort of "discussion" and you will find lots of talking and almost no listening. The participants talk over, talk past, and talk louder, but they never seem to listen. They never seem to *hear*. Interestingly enough, even the folks that tune in and can't participate in the "discussion" find themselves also talking – to the television, or to screen images a couple thousand miles away that obviously can neither hear nor respond. No one is ever persuaded by something like that. No one is ever convinced or won over. Those talking just want to talk, and those tuning in for the most part already agree with the guy expressing their views.

The widely accepted solution to the problem? Listening. But it's always the *other guy* who has to listen. In your life have you ever met anyone who thinks he or she is wrong before they start listening? 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 that he is wrong. And it seems to be getting worse. The citizens in 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 people disagree, the solution that actually works is to allow a higher authority to arbitrate – to allow an authoritative outside source to decide the matter. That "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 our society now widely regards the Bible as 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 by each one of us today. These 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 among us. 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.*

So far the magnificent words of our Savior God. In order that these words might continue to fill us, instruct us, and save us, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your 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 everything that was going on around them, they condoned and supported it. They enabled it.

At the time 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.

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 today. Yet the lies are not diminishing; they are spreading to other denominations.

The solution? First, shut up.

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 "shut up" part of our sermon theme 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 you think 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 shut up and listen, you will spend your 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 despicable we naturally 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 us, 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 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 he 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 hearts with his gospel. Could there be any better news to share with the world? Could there be any higher calling in this life than to tell others about this one path to heaven? Is there any cause more worthy of the very best of our time, talents, and treasure? 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. God grant us also the courage and determination that we will surely need if we are to carry that law and gospel message to the world in which we live, beginning with our own children. The torch has been passed to us. It is our watch. Let this truth that we have now *heard* and *believed* be the heart and passion – the obsession – of our earthly existence. 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} **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 27, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 263 (Red Hymnal)

"O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

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 Gospel 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 – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 259 (Red Hymnal)

"Flung to the Headless Winds"

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

"Shut Up, Listen, and Live"

The Offertory – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

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

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 774 (Brown Hymnal)

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

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.

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – In humble obedience to God's Word, we practice "Fellowship Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others (not wanting them 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 first meet with the pastor before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-6:00 p.m.	– Joint Reformation Service
	-9:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Jamestown
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Class
Friday	-6:00 p.m.	– November Time Out
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – The Call Committee on Institutions has called Pastor Michael Eichstadt to the ILC faculty.

Church Council Meeting Notes – Five members of the Church Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the October 20 meeting. The Treasurer's report showed a \$2,400 surplus in August and a \$2,321 surplus year-to-date. Work on the various fall maintenance projects is on-going. This year's Advent services are scheduled for December 4, 11, and 18, and will follow the format adopted last year. The Annual Church Christmas party is scheduled for December 7th and the Annual Meeting is scheduled for December 22nd. The next Council meeting date is November 3rd.

Joint Reformation Service – Is this evening at 6p in Jamestown. Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a study conference on Monday.