

Sermon for October 25th, 2026
REFORMATION SUNDAY

READINGS

Revelation 14:6-13

6 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."

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." **9** And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Psalms 46

- 1** God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- 2** Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
- 4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5** God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6** The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7** The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- 8** Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9** He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10** "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
- 11** The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Romans 3:19-28

19 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.

Matthew 11:11-19

11 “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** 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.”

Our text for meditation this Reformation Sunday is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction: The Problem

About one hundred and fifty thousand people perish every day. That is six thousand two hundred and fifty every hour, or one hundred and four per minute, or close to two per second. While two thirds of these are due to age-related health problems or cancer, it still adds up to fifty six million per year... that's a lot of death.¹ To put this in perspective, that is just a few million away from the death toll of World War II, which stood at sixty million. The world loses a World War Two's worth of people every year.

Each one of these deaths is more than just a death. Not one of them is as simple as “this person was here and then he was not.” Each person to pass on lived with varying degrees of pain, sorrow, oppression, poverty, disability, confusion, and strife. Mothers who live with decades of tears shed seeing their children die in war. Old men who waste away in body and mind as Alzheimer's and cancer erode everything to them. Young men broken by labor or thrown to the wolves in prison, young women carried off into the hands of traffickers. And the children – my friends, they are the most assaulted demographic: history is nothing more than a pile of dead children. And of all these, each time someone dies there is a great deal of sorrow welling up in the hearts of all who will miss them, often enough to

¹ As of this writing, fifty million have died in 2026 so far:
<https://www.worldometers.info/>

match the pain and suffering which *caused* their death in the first place.

Death is the problem. A pious soul might try to correct me here and say that our sin is the problem because it *causes* death, but that is simply not the case. Death was one of the punishments chosen by God on account of mankind's fall in the Garden of Eden. He *could* have chosen any other chastisement upon us and let our initial immortality remain, but that would be unjust. High treason is punishable by death in any just society: why wouldn't the Almighty King and Creator of all reality maintain that very rule for His own people? It would be unjust not to! And since Adam's sin corrupted our nature, we all end up sinning and thus we all are under the sentence of death: as St. Paul says in this very Epistle, "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."²

In the back of everyone's mind, they understand that this is the reality of the human condition: death is the problem. Because of this, two things are true for every man. First, every human being worships something; in light of the dangers and torments of the world, we trust in whatever we believe to be the source of all our good. There is no such thing as a true atheist. Second, every human being has a *savior*, someone or something that they trust in to alleviate the human condition. That second dynamic in man's life is the focus of our meditation for today and why it is so pertinent to the Reformation.

A savior or The Savior

Death is the problem, as well as all the suffering that it brings. Every individual has faith in a savior then to get them past this problem. The question every one of us must ask before we go to the grave is "Who is my savior?" Who do I look to for solving this problem? Now at this point I could go on and on about the proffered saviors of ancient and modern false religions. I could bring up krishna, shiva, allah, odin, ahura mazda, and more. I could point out the heretical false versions of the true God, from the false deity of the jews to the false gods of mormonism to the jehovah's witnesses and all sorts of other cults. But the problem is, none of these false religions and heretical cults offer salvation; they offer *transaction*. Do this to merit a good afterlife. Do that to earn resurrection. Follow this laundry list of stupid rules and don't forget to tithe endlessly so that you get a better reincarnation or whatever. False gods do little more than help someone work toward their goal.

This means my friends that for every man there are only two saviors to choose from: Jesus or the self. If a man refuses to believe in Jesus, all he has left is himself to get past the human condition. The people who believe in false religions find themselves bending over backwards to follow the maze of rules put out by the religious authorities in a crazed effort to pay off bad karma, follow the Law prescribed by Moses, get permission from allah to enjoy seventy two virgins, or stop existing altogether as siddhartha said. Because all of these religions are false, all their rules and all the works people do to follow them are completely futile. For the secular person, someone who claims no religion, this means acquiring lots of money, prestige, power, and pleasure so they can say they "had a good run" or "built a legacy." This is obviously fruitless, since the secular one's efforts still result in death.

Jesus is different. Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to die on a cross as a propitiation, a *satisfaction*, for the wrath of God on mankind. Knowing that no man could be justified – that is, declared righteous and meriting eternal life – by their own deeds, He came down to save us. Our Heavenly Father knew that no man can be his own savior, so He sent His only Son to be *The Savior* for us. Jesus died upon that Cross to pay the penalty we earned by our sins; He rose again so that whoever trusts in Him for salvation will not experience death, and in fact will live forever.³

Jesus is the Savior who *actually saves*. And if He saves you, then you do not save you. In our reading, the Apostle says that the only way we can be justified, declared innocent in God's courts, is if we receive the redemption won for us by faith in Jesus who accomplished it. This is the righteousness

2 Romans 5:12

3 Romans 4:24-25, John 11:24-26

that has been manifested apart from the works of the Law, the righteousness of Christ who needs no Law because He is perfect and without sin. If you entrust your soul to Jesus, then God sees none of your sins and all of Jesus's perfection imputed to you. It is for this reason that our Lord teaches us that salvation is a simple matter, saying that whoever believes and is Baptized shall be saved.⁴ So our Lord is the God of Justice, who does not permit that sin should go unpunished, but still expresses His infinite love for us by making the free offer of salvation unto all.

The Reformation and the Savior

The Reformation that we celebrate was nothing more than the rediscovery of this passage. It is the rediscovery that Jesus is the Savior, and if He is our Savior then we are justified by faith alone in Him. While there were always theologians and Church Fathers who understood this,⁵ false teachers entered in and began to teach salvation by works.⁶ They taught that faith in Jesus merely gave you a chance to earn eternal life through moral living, harshness to your own body, and servitude toward their priestly orders. Faith to them was nothing more than a foot in the proverbial door; in all other respects, their false Christianity was no different from the rest of the world, because it expected you to be your own savior – not Jesus.

They call it “justification by faith plus works,”⁷ but this is a falsehood. Either you are justified by faith or you are justified by your works. Either Christ is your Savior and you trust in Him to bring you eternal life, or you are your savior and must spend the entirety of your life destroying yourself over an impossible task. There is no in-between option. If it *were* the case that faith worked in conjunction with our own efforts, then that is *still* justification by works; Christ never fails, but we fail all the time. If we remain the failure-point in the question of whether we are saved, then there is no room for faith. Do not permit anyone to throw “faith plus works” in your face, even if they try to quote Bible verses at you. Do not submit to it, for it is either one or the other. Scripture attests that there is only *one* name under Heaven by which men are saved, the Name of Jesus.⁸ There is no room on His Throne for you to park your butt next to Him, and He will not permit you to put your name next to His. Either Christ is your Savior and he saves you, or you are your savior and you fail and end up damned.

Tragically, this false teaching of works-righteousness became the majority opinion in the Church, and from it flowed all the abuses we see in Church history. Wicked men were able to creep in unawares as St. Jude warned,⁹ and enter into positions of authority from which they could push Christians around. Over just a few centuries, believers were taught more and more rules that the heretics said had to be obeyed in order to get to Heaven. Do the penance, kiss the painting, pray to the saints, stare at your navel, fast for half the year, go on a pilgrimage, eat fish on Fridays, abstain from sleeping with your spouse, confess that Mary was assumed into Heaven, submit to either the Pope or the Eastern Bishops – and the list goes on and on and on forever and ever, making it harder and harder for the average Baptized believer to even *breathe*, let alone feel anything like confidence in their eternal fate. And this is in addition to the Ten Commandments and all the commands given to us in the New Testament! Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees, saying “they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”¹⁰ The scribes and Pharisees look like *anarchists* compared to the churches of Rome and of the East!

You may wonder, how did this happen? Nothing in Scripture teaches us to do so many things to

4 Mark 16:16

5 Men like Jan Hus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, the Apostolic Fathers, Irenaeus, etc.

6 Hermas, the desert fathers, Coelestius, and so many more – we have 1700 years of this wickedness proliferating.

7 If they are trying to be more marketable, they call it ‘faith working through love,’ but if you look into what they mean by that, it is the same thing.

8 Acts 4:12

9 Jude 1:3-4

10 Matthew 23:4

be saved, our reading is clear that we are justified by faith alone, and the first two centuries of Christian writing were in near-total lockstep with these teachings. Why is it that so much of the Church went along? Why didn't more people resist like Jovinian, Hus, Luther or Chemnitz? The reason is simple my friends: pride. The false doctrine of salvation by works appeals to the sinful pride of men. St. Paul says that our boasting is excluded; the sinful part of us balks at that and demands that there be a role for us to play. St. Paul says it is by the law of faith which we are saved, not by the law of works, but the part of us that wants to *boast* says that this simply will not do. So millions and millions of wayward Christians are willing to submit to corrupt, perverted and money-laundering priests if it means they can say they are good people. The majority of the Church remains astray under the cold iron shackles of endless stupid rules and limitless guilt because their pride wants to say "I got to Heaven for being so good." This problem metastasized until the 16th century, when finally original Christianity came roaring back all over Europe and the Word of God was made available for everyone.

Conclusion

Christ said that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church, with the Gospel continuing to march forward despite whatever the devil puts in as an obstacle. So in the face of that pernicious and persistent hell-gate that is works righteousness, God raised up the Reformers. Luther, Melancthon, Chemnitz, Chytraeus and all the other Evangelical heroes¹¹ stood up to proclaim the same message that our reading has proclaimed for two thousand years. We proclaim, as the Reformers and the medievals and the early Fathers and the Apostles before them did, that man is justified by faith alone in Christ. For Christ is the only Savior who *actually saves*, and this precious truth must ring out against all false religions.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord and only Savior. Amen.

¹¹ Our denomination wasn't called "Lutheran," but Evangelical at the start.