

# Psalm 119:129-136 "Reformed by God's Word"

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Will you pray with me before we come to God's Word? Father, we depend on you and we trust in you and we ask for your Holy Spirit to touch us this morning so that we might hear your Word for what it is and trust you and obey you and walk with you more faithfully today. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Kindly be seated. Great to see all of you and great to step in for George. My name's Steve and I'm pleased to be able to step in while George is away. Obviously, I thoroughly enjoy participating and celebrating the supper, but it's a special privilege to be able to open up the scriptures with you this morning. It's the Sunday in October when Protestant churches all around the world celebrate the Reformation. And so I want to wish you happy Reformation Sunday.

I'm not sure what the response to that is, but anyway, there you go. It was on October 31st, 1517, that Martin Luther thought he'd start a little conversation about the practice and sale of indulgences in his day. And so he posted those 95 theses to the door of All Saints Churches.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] Now, I heard when I was in Wittenberg a couple of years back, maybe three now, that he didn't actually nail them because for whatever reason, the historians there know he didn't nail those, which we often see in those pictures. Apparently, he posted them somehow. Anyway, they got on to that door of All Saints Church. And the important question, of course, is what are indulgences? Many of you know, I expect, that they had come to be a way to be released from purgatory.

The idea was that a surplus of merits, here was the theological justification, a surplus of merits, merits obtained by Christ and the saints, were stored up somehow in heaven. And so that these could be applied to you and me as pardons for sin if we perform the prescribed penance. The convenient thing about this was that the sale of indulgences was helping the church to get out of financial straits and also to build St. Peter's Church there in Rome. Now, Luther wasn't the first to think that every detail about this project was especially great. But things came together in his time in such a way that formal separation from the papacy became inevitable by 1521. Now, I'm going to give a bit of an extended introduction because of the day that we're celebrating before we come to our passage, which I want to unpack with you. But the fact of the separation has caused many in our day to wonder whether we're supposed to actually be celebrating the Reformation. In fact, one prominent theologian in our own denomination wrote this not so very long ago. He said, I think the Reformation is not something to celebrate but is primarily something that we should lament, that it is primarily a tragedy.

And the idea here is that Protestantism, while it may have been historically necessary, is fundamentally flawed because it left every believer, as it were, alone with his or her Bible, so to speak, and therefore free to kind of invent yet one more version of the Christian faith.

Now, I would just give a quick answer to that. As long as sin reigns in the human heart, well, so will factionalism. This idea that we, just like Paul saw there and was speaking to the Corinthians about

the factions that were forming. It's been a problem for the church ever since we got our start. Just consider that passage there in 1 Corinthians where Paul is writing to them about their divisions. And in any case, we have to say this. The Protestant Reformation was not an effort to set up a third team over and against Rome or Byzantium just to pick places in the Christian world.

It wasn't a call to say, come join Team Wittenberg or come join Team Zurich or Strasbourg, which was another important center, or Geneva. It wasn't that at all. So what was it?

[ 5 : 50 ] Well, the Protestant Reformation was intentionally a Catholic movement, meaning a movement that aimed to safeguard the basic, central message of the gospel as a message for all nations and all times.

It was a movement that said, look, if any of us, no matter where we are, hope to be faithful to the message of the apostles, we have to be ready to protest. That was originally a political, more of a political thing than religious, but it got used to describe this movement. It means we have to be prepared to take a stand. Well, take what sort of stand? And here, if you've studied any, much of the Reformation at all, you'll know that in the 16th century, we're talking about ideas that were going around where cardinals were in agreement with some of the basic concerns of Martin Luther. And so this is not a neat, neat break in the 16th century. There's still a lot of discussion. But the issue is related to a question we first have to ask before we even talk about what sort of stand. And that is, is it possible for a church to become unreformable? In other words, is it possible for a church to come to a point where it stops depending on what gave it birth in the first place? What formed it so that it begins to invent an alternative system of belief? And the Protestant reformers were convinced that this was possible. They weren't impressed with the idea that what the church needed was just better educated clergy or more aggressive anti-corruption efforts. They believed the church of their needed something like a renaissance, a rebirth, a reformation. A reformation not just in the heart, not just in our manners, in our way of living, but a reformation in what we teach and what we preach and even how we celebrate things, resulting in a visible gathering outside of the structures that had previously been their home. Casiodoro de Reina, you've heard me talk about the Spanish reformers.

He managed to escape the Inquisition in Spain, and he certainly saw it that way. He welcomed and celebrated la reformación, that was how he referred to the reformation, as a great work of God who had seen fit to renew the church then, cleansing it from all the doctrinal error and accretions and clutter, shall we say, that pastors had led it into through certain inventions, accretions. He referred to such accretions as dung, and they, since they obscured the grace and glory of the basic gospel message.

So how does this or that church start down that path of becoming unreformable? Well, C.S. Lewis can help us a lot here, since he gave a lot of thought to mere Christianity and to the business of commending it to others. To answer a question put to him by Roman Catholic friends and a Roman Catholic fellowship in 1944, well, why are you not a Roman Catholic? And he had many close friendships who were in the Roman Catholic Church. Lewis said this, the real reason why I cannot be in communion with you is not my disagreement with this or that Roman doctrine, but that to accept your church means not to accept a given body of doctrine, but to accept in advance any doctrine your church hereafter produces. And then he gives a comparison. It's like being asked to agree not only to what a man has said, but to what he's going to say. What Lewis was appealing to, of course, was a standard to which the visible church must be accountable. So he said, in effect, we can discuss the particulars of official Roman Catholic teaching, if you like, and that's all well and good. But this is not going to get us very far, because at the end of the day, agreement on this or that won't amount to much as long as you take the church itself to be infallible.

In other words, as long as you trust the church to be entirely trustworthy as a guide in the Christian walk, you make the church accountable to itself and not to a standard outside itself. Imagine for a moment, just to give a simple illustration, that the rules of soccer are something you make up as you go along. Josiah and I were discussing this analogy. One of my grandsons imagines that soccer is something you make up as you go along. So it happens that when I'm out in the front yard, getting into a little game of footy, as the Brits like to say, I have in my brain some basic rules that have been set down somewhere in some book. But these are all of no use to Aidan. Sorry, even grandchildren now can serve as sermon illustrations. My grandson Aidan, they're of no use, because in his brain, soccer is by definition a process, not something regulated by rules and principles you look up in a book. Now, I'm obviously stretching the point here a little bit, but it does

shed light, I think, on how a given church can make itself unreformable. And where do we see this happening? Well, just another illustration. I spent one fascinating weekend, back when I was a grad student, at a Russian Orthodox monastery. And here was a little slice of pre-1917 Russia, pre-revolutionary

[12:06] Russia, a little slice of pre-revolutionary Russia, dropped into the hills of upstate New York. I don't know, maybe you've been there. It's a place called Jordanville. Of course, I was just an observer, as an inquirer, you might say, an observer of the routines there and of the seminary, had a seminary attached to it. So the abbot, he was a very kindly man. He kind of struck me as a kind of elder Zosima, who's the saintly elder in the Brothers Karamazov. Some of you may have met. Well, he was very gracious, and I enjoyed, of course, interacting with different seminarians who were living there. My Russian used to be a little bit better. But as I got ready to leave, one of them said to me something I wasn't at all expecting, because I was, I think, a little bit naive at the time. Now that you have experienced the life of the undivided church, are you ready to come home?

That wasn't exact. They may not be the precise words, but that was the gist of it. And I would say that what I experienced there was no different from the problem that C.S. Lewis identified. The Orthodox Church may very well give special honor to Scripture in the life of the Church, as it does. Just read Callistos Ware or excellent interpreters of Russian or Eastern Orthodoxy for us today. But at the end of the day, something much wider than Scripture, an ongoing tradition, in fact, guides the faithful infallibly.

A much, something much wider than Scripture. And it's this, it's this dynamic thing that guides the faithful. It's not, it's not something that the tradition itself is accountable to.

In the Protestant world, we make the same sectarian, in other words, anti-Catholic mistake or move when we say that our, that only our fellowship here counts as the true local church.

I, I could illustrate that with another encounter, but I won't, but ask me later. But we do that sometimes. And, and it happens in the Protestant world too. And what, what's the result? Well, we start giving ourselves license to, well, to make up stuff, right? Even stuff that might be quite secondary, but, but that, but that we say, hey, you need to do this if you want to experience the fullness of, of what the Holy Spirit has for His people, right? Or we, we say, you need to do this to really be involved in what God is doing in the world today.

[14:54] You need to have this particular form of church government, or you, you need to have the evidence of, of speaking in tongues to, to show that you, that the Holy Spirit is, is active in your life. And we, and we make that something necessary for, uh, identifying with the church in its fullness.

Anyway, just some examples. So let, let me, let me return briefly then to the question of taking a stand, of protesting before we come to our, our passage.

We can say from the historical record that the reformers got themselves into trouble because they were questioning things that had come to be commonly received.

This was how it was put to Luther when he was asked to get in line with official church teaching and practice. But he was convinced that the sale of indulgences, the cult of the saints, the sacrifice of the mass were things as practiced then that obscured the basic message of the gospel.

To practice them basically meant this, Christ's sacrificial death for us on the cross is not enough. And in teaching this, the church was inventing another gospel and robbing the faithful of any assurance of salvation.

[16:18] And in our own day, without going into examples, because I spent some time on this in that series I did on, on the challenge of progressive Christianity, it's all too clear that large sections of our own Protestant world have been doing the same.

Obscuring the gospel with inventions of our own, uh, of the same order. So here's my take on the gift of the Reformation. Remember, it's not a come join, come join team Anglican, come join the Protestant, come join team Protestant.

It's, it's, it's the, under God, come help, come receive the, the, the Reformation gift of discerning the tools, uh, get, take, embrace these tools to, to discern what is basic Christianity.

To turn out to be the same tools to, to safeguard basic Christianity as it goes forward in time and to, uh, and to all the nations. And that's where Luther took his stand.

He took it on the final authority of scripture, not disregarding tradition, not setting it aside, but taking his stand on the final authority of scripture.

[17:30] So I'll just mention two, two key tools that the Reformation gave us. First, as Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross was, was more or less kind of extended into a process that took place

on an altar.

And that was supplemented by the merits obtained by the saints. The reformers insisted that God adopts us as his children, not once he sees us that we're faithful in performing religious observances and doing good deeds, but by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone.

These were the solas that were the battle cry. And here Ephesians two, eight and nine, uh, was highlighted for it is by grace. You have been saved through faith.

And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. And second, hold that same image of something becoming a process as, as God's word written was more or less collapsed into a process owned by the church, by an infallible church.

The reformers insisted that only the scriptures can be infallible. It wasn't that other texts, as I said, were to be just set aside or that we could just ignore the church's teaching role, an important role in our lives.

[ 18 : 50 ] But the scriptures alone had that final authority. So something had to serve as a standard by which to judge all human words, all human insights, experiences, traditions.

And the reformers were unanimous in their belief that God himself has provided that standard in the Bible since the Bible didn't owe its authority to men.

The reformers also made it clear that for anyone to receive God's word for what it is, the Holy Spirit has to impress it on our hearts.

And so may that be our prayer, that the Holy Spirit will do just that as we come this morning to this portion of scripture that Chris read to us, Psalm 119, starting at verse 129.

I hope you follow with me as we work our way through it and see it in three sections. I want to consider basically as an overall theme of this passage, that lesson that Paul learned in the midst of suffering and hardships.

[ 20 : 01 ] And that was that God's strength, as he said in 2 Corinthians 12, 9, is that God's strength is made known, it's made perfect, he says, in weakness.

And in the same way, I think our passage teaches us that God's power, God's word shines through as something glorious precisely in the midst of human weakness and frailty.

So let's look at three things in this passage, the nature of God's word itself, the human need, and then the impact of God's word as we put our trust in it.

So let's hear verses 129 and 130 once again. The psalmist says, Your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them.

The unfolding of your words gives light. It imparts understanding to the simple. Now the teaching about the nature of God's word here is already in these images very rich.

[ 21 : 06 ] And no doubt there are some powerful sermons just on these verses. But let me just mention three things I would want to highlight if I were to select just those verses as a sermon.

I would want to say, first of all, that God's testimonies are things that are recorded. Throughout the whole psalm, God's testimonies, which is more or less synonymous with statutes and precepts and decrees and commandments, his words, his speech, his law.

They have been given to us in writing or in oral form. But in either case, we can say this, God has spoken. He's made his way and his will known to us.

Now this, you're going to say, isn't that obvious? But it's always worth remembering, I think, that God's word is not wordless. Let me underline that.

I used to imagine, I don't know if you ever did, that God's word was wordless. And that we fumble around for words after we've had that kind of immediate mystical experience of God.

[ 22 : 27 ] And then, so the point here is that it doesn't originate, God's word does not originate in the human heart. And it's not contentless.

It comes to us from outside ourselves in intelligible speech. Holy Spirit inspired, intelligible speech. Now the second thing about God's testimonies is that they're to be opened up.

That's what unfolding means. Another translation says expounded. The point is that they're not there so we can just kind of recite them mindlessly, which we're prone to do, or display them somewhere on some nice picture.

But so that we can explain them, unpack them, interact with them, which is the mark, one of the marks, not the only mark, but one of the marks of a church.

Because we learn to love God's word together. And we seek to discuss it, and unpack it, and interact with it, and ask questions about it, struggle with it, wrestle with it.

[ 23 : 34 ] The third thing to highlight about God's speech follows from the business of unfolding. It's directed to the simple. Now here, simple, as I looked at John Wycliffe's early translation, the simple refers to the untaught or the unlearned.

Today we might say those with no formal education. But I don't think the point is that it's directed to them alone, but that even they can receive God's light, knowledge of who he is, and what he asks of us.

It's a question here of approaching God's word with humility, and letting it do its work in us, having its way with us, rather than the other way around.

Now these reveal truths that God has spoken intelligibly, that his speech is to be expounded, and that enlightens those who approach it with a teachable heart.

Cause us to declare this, Your testimonies are marvelous, Lord. They are more to be desired than gold, as Psalm 19:10 says.

[ 24 : 45 ] Yea, than much fine gold in the King James. I don't know about you, but I'm encouraged this morning, as I think about the exposition of the word as a means of grace.

Something central to the Reformation vision of making the proclaimed word and the explained word central to the way we do church.

I'm encouraged as I see what we might so easily take for granted. I'm encouraged when I see God raising up teachers and preachers and people who dedicate so much of their time to helping us understand God's word.

Well, with that, let's turn to the second theme, the human need, which we learn about in verses 132 to 135. So let me read those again.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name. Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

[ 25 : 56 ] Redeem me from man's oppression that I may keep your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your statutes. Here we have, in these four verses, we have the shape of the human need.

So what is that shape? Well, the first thing we need is God's presence and his mercy. Turn to me, we learn to ask. And this psalm is teaching us, isn't it?

It's teaching us how to pray. We learn to ask for God to turn towards us because God wants us to know that our most basic need is not for the good things that he bestows.

It's for him, for the right relationship that only he can give us. And so we depend on the mercy that comes to us from his grace so that that right relationship can be restored.

And that's the foundation. That's what it is that we need to be asking for. In the second place, from there, we need his direction, don't we? We need his direction, and we need spiritual protection.

[ 27 : 14 ] Notice how God teaches us to ask for those things. He wants us to know that our steps are to be guided not by our own intuitions and our own insights and hunches, but by his word.

That's what according to your promise means. And isn't it wonderful that in the next breath we learn to say, we're taught to say, so that sin won't have its way in my life?

The truth here is that as we abide in God's word, we come to realize that it serves both to guide us, but also to protect us from the iniquity that comes up right out of our own hearts.

And then in the third place, we need deliverance from external harm, from man's oppression, from harm that comes to us from outside ourselves, not from our own hearts.

Even as we know that to follow Jesus is to experience persecution in this life, we learn that it's not unspiritual to ask God for this kind of protection.

[ 28 : 16 ] Notice the reason. We ask for it so that we can keep his commandments. Now, since his commandments don't only pertain to that vertical relationship with God, but also to our horizontal relationship with others, we're asking that God's justice, his righteousness, might be manifested in the day-to-day, in the world around us.

And finally, we need instruction in God's law. Since we're called to pray, teach me your statutes. We do this trusting that God's face and his favor will shine on us continually.

Now, this is a little sidebar, but just a way of engaging the text. As you take passages like these in the Psalms, I encourage you to take note of the logic and the shape as you study them.

I'm sure many of you do. But I think you'll find it a blessing to understand something of how God teaches us to depend on him for this comprehensive need that we have for direction, for protection, for instruction, which he promises to give us by his word.

And it's there as a promise and as a prayer in this psalm. And this brings me to the third heading, the impact of God's word as we trust in it.

[ 29 : 43 ] When we come to God's word humbly, what sort of response does it evoke in us? Well, have a look again at verses 129 and then 131.

We see there that God's word moves us to obedience and to thirst for more of his word. So we learn to declare to God, your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them. And that I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments. Now, what's key here, I think, is that the basis and end of our longing and desire to obey is God's word itself. This speaks to us of that wonderful, remarkable encounter that the Holy Spirit brings about through the word, drawing us into a relationship of trust.

It's not our natural longing, as we know so well. In fact, it's not hard at all, isn't it, to demonstrate how distracted we become and how preoccupied we become with things that are of little value.

[ 30 : 49 ] The simple and only reason that we ever come to think and describe God's statutes as marvelous so that we long to actually know him more and more is that God has let his word unfold before us and in us, bringing light and hope and joy into our lives.

Now, if you've never heard God's word as a marvelous word, and that is your desire today, to come to him in humility, then let me encourage you to take that promise in verse 130.

It's God's promise to you today. The unfolding of your words gives light. It imparts understanding to the simple. Now, there's a second response that God's word evokes in us here in the passage, and it's there in verse 136.

Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed. Let me call this the missionary response. Whatever motives we might have to share the good news with others, and there are many good ones, we see here that the most basic motive for sharing the good news with others is the realization that God's name isn't honored the way it should be.

That instead of seeking God's kingdom, his power, and his glory, people build their lives around things that are just passing away. Now, here again, we're aware of how much our own motives are disordered and how much we need God's continued renewal and reformation of our hearts, but I think the message of the verse is meant to encourage us.

[ 32 : 39 ] To the extent that Christ abides in us and we abide in him, we find ourselves increasingly more and more troubled by the fact that his will and commandments are publicly derided, publicly ignored, or twisted under the form of some other form of religion or having the appearance of godliness.

Now, I trust that as we've worked through this passage this morning, we've seen something of the glory of God's word and how it addresses our deepest needs and longings.

So to move towards a conclusion, what does this mean when it comes back to celebrating the Reformation? Well, I want to leave us with three good reasons why I think we should celebrate the Reformation today with thanksgiving to God for all those that he raised up to reform the church, not a once-and-for-all Reformation, but to an ongoing Reformation.

Each of these reasons highlights the way in which the power and majesty of God's word, such as we see here in Psalm 119. Revolutionized is the only word that fits.

Revolutionized the reformers' thinking about the church. Specifically, it helped them to recover biblical images of the church which had been obscured or forgotten.

[ 34 : 13 ] And this, in turn, helped them and us to think more biblically about where we're going as God's people, where we've been as God's people, and what our present task is.

So let me allude to those briefly. Question one, where are we going? Here the image or model of the church that emerged was not of a powerful, established institution, but of a called-out people who know that they have no lasting city here, in the words of Hebrews 13, 14.

But seek which city? Well, the city that's to come. From here, we recognize our need for ongoing reform, since we can never confuse the church with God's word, something we're in the habit of doing sometimes, since we depend on God's word, and we owe our existence to it.

Just as faith in the life of you and me comes from hearing and hearing from God's word, Romans 10, 17, so the church is a creation of the word and is sustained by it.

So that's where we're going. Where have we been? What can we say about our past? And what can we say about his way with those who love his name, as verse 132 said.

[ 35 : 37 ] His way with those who love his name. Here the reformers recovered the biblical theme of the church as a priesthood of all believers. That royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2, 9.

A people set apart, God's people set apart by him to be a holy nation, called to announce something, called to declare his praises. Who called that people out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Now apart from reminding us that we depend on God to bring us to his promised land, this model of the church as the priesthood of all believers has taught us that there's no strict division between lay and ordained.

And that the church is not the clergy, as I recall, which was the assumption of one young man who said back in England, I'm going into the church, which meant I'm going to be ordained.

Right? There isn't that confusion there. It follows from there that biblical literacy is not something for a special class of Christians. Or that godliness is the calling of a select few, while the rest of us can be content with just being ordinary Christians, with a call to a lesser standard.

[ 36 : 55 ] So that's the future, very briefly, and the past, where we've been. Well, what is the church's business in the present? Since the reformers had left the papacy behind them, they inevitably had to answer the question, well, where's the church?

Ubi ecclesia. Where's the church? And that what they recovered from scripture was that basic local Christian fellowship that we find in Acts 2.42, that was marked by its devotion to the teaching of the apostles, by its devotion to fellowship and to breaking bread and to praying together, that basic local church.

What this means is that the 16th century, as the 16th century Christians, we're learning to say with the 16th century Christians, Calvin, Cranmer, and others, that the church is to be found, where is the church?

Well, it's to be found wherever God's word is faithfully preached and where the gospel sacraments are celebrated as Jesus commanded. That creates a wide tent. That's a very wide tent under God for, as we think about Christian unity, which I'll say a word about in a second.

What this meant in practice, though, as we think of the church gathered, was that the church, the church's centralized institutional structures, receded into the background as the worshiping community came into the foreground.

[ 38 : 28 ] Here, the high point of public worship became the reading and exposition of Scripture so that the faithful could feed on the living bread of heaven. Accordingly, the sacraments were understood not as optional extras, but something which served God's word.

Visible words, as Calvin said. In a way, the church was just as much an event as a fixed place you could look up on a map if you think about it.

That idea has troubled some. The idea, oh, okay, so the church is just this disconnected series of events that happen here and there. Well, not precisely, but we need to understand that the proclamation of God's word is a means of grace and that this event of God using the faithful proclamation as a means to draw people to Jesus and to keep them in Jesus was just that. It was the event that is being highlighted there. Yes, the event needs to be, we need to seek under God to safeguard it, but that becomes secondary.

So this obviously has implications for unity. Here's where a Protestant insight is actually quite a wonderful thing and easy to miss. The fact is, as I suggested earlier, we tend to have a kind of rose-colored view of early unity with things more or less only disintegrating later on.

[ 39 : 55 ] But the recovery of the biblical model of the church as a pilgrim people needing constant reform, constant reformation by God's word allows us to see that unity, which, while it's a gift of the Holy Spirit, is also a task that we are to maintain until Jesus comes again.

And the question from there becomes, well, by what means are we to seek to be in fellowship with others who call Jesus Lord? Well, with the Reformers, we can be confident that our unity isn't fundamentally an institutional one.

I'm not an anti-institutionalist, please don't get me wrong, but our fundamental unity is not institutional since the institution owes its existence to something greater.

Neither is it a sentimental one where we ground fellowship in a feeling that we're one with others.

It's got to be more than that. Ultimately, unity has to be based on what God has revealed because it's his word that created and sustains the church as it goes to all nations, marking it with the marks of love and hope and the cross.

Now, if this is true, what we're called to today is the hard work of being clear about what is mere Christianity. I've heard George say, as Anglicans, Anglicanism at its best is having a go at mere Christianity.

[ 41 : 27 ] I don't think those were his words exactly. But in this sense, C.S. Lewis was being a great missionary and a great Protestant when he said this, Ever since I became a Christian, I have thought that the best, perhaps the only service I could do for my unbelieving neighbors, was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.

Hear this, notice this, this Catholic, this universal urge, what has been believed in all times and in all places. Together with, there's got to be a standard, right?

What has, this discerning, what is mere Christianity that he does so well in his book. So I'll close with this. The life and witness of the Protestant reformers is to be celebrated because it draws us into a two-fold task, and we can say a two-fold hope, if you like, as world Christians, which is what we are, under the authority of God's word.

First, to announce with all those who trust in Jesus that he and he alone is our one hope in life and in death. And second, to discern when we're called to work for renewal from within the structure that we happen to belong to, and when we must separate from a body that has made itself unreformable.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the witness of the reformers today as we celebrate the Reformation.

[ 43 : 09 ] We do this not out of a desire to carry our team flag, but to recognize that it's only by your word that we live.

we ask that you would make us alert to opportunities to share our faith, but also to be one with all those who trust in you, to find ways to announce the same message of hope and joy in the world that we live in that you've called us to be in.

Help us to look generously upon others, help us to listen, help us to discern from day to day what it is you call us to do when it comes to questions of unity, that in all this we trust in your mighty word and in its power to change us, to redeem us, to transform us, to live for you in this world.

In Jesus' name, Amen.