Beloved congregation of Christ: Most Reformed churches worldwide commemorated Reformation Sunday last Lord's Day, October 27. However, I waited for this Lord's Day because the sermon on the Feast of Trumpets in our series on the Seven Feasts of Israel happen to fall on this Sunday. What is the connection between this festival and the commemoration of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation? Let us recount the events that occurred in Europe on October 31, 1517.

No, I'm not referring to the Halloween celebration 496 years ago. Halloween was a festival celebrated by ancient pagan Druids in the British Isles, and didn't come to America until about 1900. Germans in 1517 didn't know anything about Halloween and its wandering spirits of the dead, trick or treating, and candies. No, I'm referring to that night when the Roman Catholic priest Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the wall of the Wittenberg Castle.

To clarify a few things about this historic event, first of all, this was not a declaration that he was leaving the Catholic Church to establish a Protestant Church. Rather, Luther was an angry Catholic pleading to Germany's emperor and the Roman Pope to stop the abuses of indulgences. Indulgences, as you may know, provided a way of lessening the time a Catholic—even a dead one—might have to spend in purgatory by paying money to the church. Pope Leo X pushed the idea hard because the church was bankrupt after he had embezzled the church's money with his riotous lifestyle.

Secondly, Luther posted his 95 Theses as an ordinary invitation to an academic debate about indulgences. Thirdly, his theses were almost exclusively about the abuses of the church related to indulgences. Fourthly, he did not expect his 95 Theses to spread so rapidly and widely and spark the Protestant Reformation. Lastly, in 1517, he was not yet a “Protestant” or “Reformed” because he did not as yet understand key Protestant doctrines such as the Five Solas.

However, by the time he was tried at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he was already convinced that justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. Because Luther was already preaching the true gospel in opposition to the Church's teaching, the Pope excommunicated him, calling him “a wild boar,” and his break with the Roman church was final. According to the Reformers, since the Church of Rome was not preaching the true gospel, was not rightly administering the sacraments, and was not rightly exercising church discipline according to Scripture, it had ceased to be a true church.

Luther trumpeted the true gospel that was almost extinguished by the medieval church, a proclamation of a new beginning for the church. The Feast of Trumpets, the fifth of seven feasts appointed for Israel, was also a proclamation of the beginning of a new agricultural year. This feast later became Israel's new year celebration known as Rosh Hashanah, the “head of the year.”
Our text today in Ezekiel 33 also spells out the duty which the LORD assigned to his watchman Ezekiel in Israel. Like Jesus, Ezekiel was a prophet before and during Israel's exile in Babylon. The LORD appointed him to warn God's people of impending judgment against them for their multitudes of sins. He was to preach only the Word of the LORD. If he did not do his ordained duty, and the people perished, their blood will be upon his hand. But if he did, and the people did not listen and perished, he is not responsible. And if the people listened, they would be saved.

In preaching the gospel, Jesus trumpeted the good news of the coming of his kingdom. But he also heralded bad news: judgment is coming on those who do not listen to him.

So our theme this Lord's Day is “Trumpeting the Gospel of the Reformation” under three headings: (1) The Trumpet Duty of the Watchman; (1) The Trumpet Message of the Watchman; and (3) The Response of the People to the Watchman's Trumpet.

**The Trumpet Duty of the Watchman**

The Feast of Trumpets was appointed by God for Israel to be celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. Every new moon was a holy day, but the seventh month was the *holiest month* for Israel. On this month, the *holiest day* of the year, the solemn Day of Atonement, and the joyous Feast of Booths, were also celebrated.

Leviticus 23:23-25 only tells us that the Feast of Trumpets is a “blast of trumpets,” a day of rest with a holy assembly, and food offerings. But in Numbers 29:1-6, these food offerings are detailed—a burnt offering for a pleasing aroma, and as dedication of their lives to the LORD; a grain offering and a drink offering for thanksgiving; and a sin offering to make atonement for sin. While trumpets were blown on other events, it may be that on this day, they were blown from morning till evening.

Why were the trumpets blown on this day? First, as pointed out earlier, it was an announcement of the beginning of a new year. Second, it was a call to prepare for the holiest month of the year. Third, it was a call for the people to assemble for worship, and to hear God's Word once more. Every Feast of Trumpets, the people might have anticipated God's revelation of his power and an announcement of good news, just as it was when they were called together by God to worship him and covenant with him at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:13).

Fourth, in blowing trumpets made of ram's horns (shofar), Israel must have remembered the LORD's gracious provision of a ram as a substitute for Isaac in Genesis 22. Lastly, it was a plea to God to remember Israel, “On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets... They shall be a reminder of you before your God...” (Nm 10:10; also verses 8-9) The trumpet sound reminded them that the LORD remembers his people.

In the wilderness, the trumpets were sounded as a signal to move out of camp or to gather the people to hear God's Word (Nm 10:1-8). They were also blown during times of war—as a call to arms, during battles, or as a call to cease fighting, or when an enemy approaches.

This last use of the blowing of trumpets is the connection between the Feast and Ezekiel 33's watchman. The watchman is stationed in the watchtower high on the city walls, watching for any
sign of danger from invaders. As soon as he determines there is approaching danger, he is duty-bound to blow the trumpet to warn the people of Israel to prepare to defend themselves.

This then is the watchman's duty: to watch for any danger and to warn the people. And how does he warn the people? What message does he announce?

**The Trumpet Message of the Watchman**

What did God assign Ezekiel to do as a watchman? "Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (verse 7). Whatever the LORD tells his watchmen to say to the people, they are to say it with nothing added and nothing subtracted. If it's good news, they are to proclaim it with joy. If it's bad news, they are to proclaim it with lamentations and sorrow and a call to repentance.

In the ancient days, there were heralds who ran from battle scenes to the palace of the king to bring the news of the battle. If they won the battle, the herald was welcomed as a hero. If he brought the bad news of defeat, he was executed for being the bearer of bad news.

Such are God's watchmen-prophets. They are to trumpet God's Word to the people, whether it be the bad news of judgment because of sin, or good news of salvation from their enemies. God warned Ezekiel about his duty: If he didn't warn the people of impending disaster, and the people perish, "his blood I will require at the watchman's hand" (verse 6).

When Jesus started his earthly ministry in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, he announced a new beginning for his people, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:19). He was fulfilling the year of the Jubilee "to proclaim liberty throughout the land" (Lv 25:9) and "a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land" (Lv 25:4; see also 25:11). Jesus proclaimed that his people will be set free from slavery to sin, and will begin resting from all their labors in order to gain favor from God. Instead, Jesus himself will do all the righteous works, fulfilling all God's laws for his people.

Jesus started his ministry with a proclamation, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). This announcement was a double-edged sword. If the hearers repented of their sin and believed in the gospel of Christ, they enter the kingdom of God. If they did not, they are cast into the outer darkness.

Today, pastors are commanded by God to preach the true gospel. According to the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." But how do we know that the pure Word of God is being preached? The confession states two qualifications. First, the preacher must be "lawfully called." Only ordained ministers of the Word are to preach during the worship service, not just any self-proclaimed "pastor." Second, "neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven." Therefore, the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God insofar as it is faithfully exposited and applied by the preacher according to inspired Scripture.

Many pastors invent their own "word" of God in preaching all kinds of false gospels or half-gospels. They fail to be faithful watchmen of the Lord. So as members of Christ's church, you too must also become watchmen to stave off destruction. When you hear your pastor preach self-
inventions, you must blow the warning trumpet. When your pastor says God whispered a “new revelation” in his ear, or saw a vision from God, blow the trumpet! When you hear the name-it-and-claim-it gospel or the prosperity gospel, sound the trumpet! When your pastor teaches that justification is by holy living, sound the alarm, because he is going back to the false gospel of Rome! When all your pastor preaches about Daniel and his friends is how to have a healthy diet, blow the horn! When God's law, sin and repentance go missing from your worship service, sound the trumpet!

If your pastor neglects his duty as God's watchman, it is your duty as God's people to be the watchman. Paul commands you to test all spirits, to be like Bereans, to listen only to sound doctrine. But if your pastor dutifully does his responsibility as a watchman, what must the people do?

**The Response of the People to the Watchman's Trumpet**

The watchman has his duties. But the people are also responsible.

If Ezekiel proclaimed God's warning of judgment against the gross sins of the people, he already did what God commanded him to do. Then if the people did not heed his warning and they perish, “*his blood shall be upon himself*” (verse 5). They are responsible for their own destruction, not the watchman. The watchman cannot make them repent or believe in the Word of the LORD. These are the works of the Holy Spirit alone—giving new hearts and new minds to the elect. But the watchman's responsibility is clear: announce God's Word to sinners.

What is the sinner to do? He has two options. First, he may heed God's Word announced by the watchman, whether it be good or bad news. If it's the good news of salvation from enemies or from sin or from God's wrath, he is to be thankful for such salvation. If it's the bad news of judgment and punishment against sin, he is to repent and turn away from sin and turn to God for redemption.

Second, the sinner can reject God's Word proclaimed by the watchman. If he does, God's Word is only bad news, the bad news of eternal death. His blood is upon his own head. No one else is responsible for his own condemnation except himself. “*For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God... And the wages of sin is death*” (Rm 3:23; 6:23). He “*shall die in his iniquity*” (verse 9).

This is why the watchmen of the new covenant of grace—ministers and elders of the church—carry a heavy burden on their shoulders. They are the ones who “*are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give account*” (Hb 13:17). Paul speaks of their duty as apostles sent by Christ, “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*” And what is his appeal to all? “*Be reconciled to God [in Christ]. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2Co 5:20-21).

They are to preach the gospel, “in season or out of season” (2Tm 4:2), because God's judgment is upon them if they didn't, “*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*” (1Co 9:16). Only then can he declare his innocence, “*I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God*” (Ac 20:26,27). He has faithfully declared good news and bad news, law and grace, repentance and faith, God's mercy and justice, his love and wrath, and heaven and hell. He is what Isaiah and Paul declares:

“*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!*” (Rm 10:15)
These watchmen will continue blowing the trumpet till the last trumpet is blown to announce the return of Christ from heaven to complete the salvation of his people:

**Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed** (1Co 15:51-52).

His return will be an earth-shaking, loud, visible event, not a secret coming as many pastors mistakenly teach:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first (1Th 4:16).

According to John, when this last (seventh) trumpet is blown, loud voices in heaven will announce, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rv 11:15). It will also signal Judgment Day, “the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints” (Rv 11:18).

Brothers and sisters, you too are all watchmen, bringers of good news. You are to trumpet the gospel proclaimed by Isaiah, Paul, and the Protestant Reformers: justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You are to be “evangelists,” bringers of good news to everyone along your path, till the last trumpet is blown to announce Jesus’ Second Coming.

The good news is that Christ is the merciful, pre-eminent watchman. He knew judgment was coming upon sinners, and he sounded the gospel trumpet of forgiveness. But he himself provided the way of forgiveness when he took the blood of sinners upon his own head. As the gracious watchman, he bore upon his body and blood the judgment of God upon sinners who would repent and believe in him.

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