Pastor Elden Zuern gives his final sermon as the regular pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church during a service Oct. 28.

Final message from the podium

BY DANIEL ARENS

One long-time local pastor gave his farewell sermon to a congregation he has preached to and cared for over the last 15 years.

Elden Zuern said he would still be open to helping out at times and at different places where a preacher may be needed for a specific situation, but his time as a regular minister has drawn to a close.

Zuern, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday, gave the message last Sunday to the congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church, a rural church about midway between Hazen and Pick City. Zuern became involved with the church shortly after moving back to Mercer County, his original home, following years of ministry in Massachusetts.

For Lutheran churches, and many Protestant congregations, the Sunday before Oct. 31 is Reformation Sunday, when these churches remember the Protestant Reformation and the split from the Roman Catholic Church that occurred 500 years ago. Zuern tied his message to Martin Luther's Reformation and the importance of faith over works.

"It is an act of grace, an act of forgiveness, that saves us," Zuern said. "Because we have the assurance of salvation, that is why we do the good works."

Zuern also connected his message to the recent tragedies in this country, including the massacre of 11 people at a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh, Penn. and the threat of bombs against political opponents.

"We used to be able to talk about politics," Zuern lamented. "We used to be able to disagree about politics. And we used to be friends."

Zuern called on his congregation and other Christians to show a different picture to the world.

"It is in the church that we help each other and support each other," he said.

Zuern ended his sermon thanking the congregation for the support they have shown to him and his wife Norma over the years.

"I have had so many things to be grateful for over all the years, and the last 15 years have been no exception," he said. "We have felt a part of you, and we will continue to feel a part of you."