

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Sermon: “Christ, the King”

Some call today the “Last Sunday in the Church Year” while others prefer “Christ the King Sunday.” Unlike our text from 1 Corinthians the other readings exploit the irony of associating kingship with the shepherding of sheep. Psalm 95 exalts ***“the great King above all gods”*** (v 3) and concludes with the assertion that ***“we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care”*** (v 7a).

The Old Testament Reading from Ezekiel 34 also sees the messianic successor in Israel to King David as a shepherd, and his detailed job description includes tending and pasturing the sheep, searching for the lost and bringing back those who stray, binding up the injured and strengthening the weak. The Gospel from Matthew 25 is the well-known judgment scene in which the returning Son of Man proceeds like the shepherd to separate ***“the sheep from the goats.”***

Those at his right hand are the ones whose faith has been actively lived out in love toward their needy neighbors. All the texts fill out the definition of the kingdom that Christ has come to bring into being and the ministry to which all Christians are called as they await his return in glory.

If you are like many, you are a fan of professional football, and you enjoy watching the games on TV or in person. You also know that some games are over by the half because one of the teams has built up a seemingly insurmountable lead over the other, and that by this time of the year, certain teams have such a bad record that they have little or no hope of making the play-offs leading to the Super Bowl. As they play, teams on the short end of things often only “go through the motions,” or even quit, thus confirming to themselves and everyone else that they are “losers.”

Other teams in the same predicament keep playing “hard” in order to keep the respect of their opponents and their fans. Defeat may be inevitable. Nevertheless, teams with this kind of attitude go out looking like “winners.”

Life in this world is not a football game. But the question remains, “What’s the Christian attitude toward it?” This morning, Paul, in our text from 1 Corinthians 15, surveys the entire playing field of human existence, stretching from Easter morning to the day when Christ the King returns as the King of glory. He not only asserts that Christ must reign, but also invites us in this day and time to help further that reign. Despite any evidence of defeat in the world around us or in our own lives, we can in fact act like winners.

To be sure that Christ must reign, we keep going back to his resurrection on the first Easter Sunday. Christ’s resurrection is the foundation stone of our faith. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 asserts that it actually happened.

He states that without it, our faith in Christ is **“useless”** (v 14). Every Sunday for Christians is a “little Easter” celebration.

Christ’s resurrection foreshadows our resurrection at the Last Day.

Paul states that Christ is **“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”** (v 20). He asserts that while we all will die because of Adam’s sin, **“in Christ [we] all will be made alive”** (v 22). He also tells us that this means **“those who belong”** to Christ, and that it will happen when our King comes again (vs 23–24).

Many of us find it a stirring experience to sing the spiritual entitled **“Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”** because it removes any doubt about the fact that it was our sins that put Christ to death on the cross. It is one of my favorite hymns. We sing it on Good Friday minus the last verse. It asks the another question: **“Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?”** Christ’s resurrection not only occurred, but it also guarantees our resurrection following death.

Because Christ must reign, we can believe that he will prevail over all the forces that are opposed to his Kingdom. An “enemies list” so to speak is to be found in our text (v 24). Paul calls attention to the **“dominion, authority and power”** (v 24). Such opponents are natural as well as supernatural. In the Gospel from Matthew 25, Jesus cites hunger, poverty, homelessness, sickness, and crime. The last, and perhaps greatest, opponent is **“death”** (v 26).

Death separates us from each other, and even those who have the hope of resurrection experience the pain and the grief that this brings. Death also appears in many forms, and some of us have experienced the loss of the same person more than once.

Alzheimer’s disease ravages the brain of more and more people each day. Patients become disoriented with respect to time, place, and person. Some retain memory of skills that were learned in the past. But how to perform new tasks can no longer be learned.

With this terrible disease come depression, personality change, and sometimes inability to remember one's own children and spouse. The victim of Alzheimer's disease may continue to live. Yet to the person whom the family once knew and loved, death has already come.

Christ the King, our Lord and Savior will ultimately prevail over all opponents of his Kingdom. Ever since his ascension, Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the Father. Paul asserts that at Jesus' second coming all forces that stand in opposition to the God of Jesus Christ will be completely obliterated. Even now we can believe that ***"in all things God works for the good of those who love him"*** (Romans 8:28).

The fact that Christ must reign enables us to act like winners. Our Baptism into Christ gives us a way to conquer the "enemy" within. We sin daily, and this separates us from each other as well as from God. Through daily repentance we put the old Adam to death and experience a new-life resurrection in Christ.

The fellowship of a Christian congregation creates countless opportunities to shepherd one another from day to day.

In our Old Testament Reading Ezekiel furnishes a detailed job description of this ministry. For this reason, our church has small groups, prayer groups, and study groups available to members and nonmembers alike. The mission of our congregation, and others like it, is to further Christ's reign in the world around us, to share the Gospel and care for one another.

Today's Gospel from Matthew 25 gives us one set of illustrations. Perhaps you choose to come to our church every week to teach a child, or prepare the community meals, when we can again. No matter why you come or what ministry you are involved in or talent you share you are adding another square foot to the kingdom over which Christ reigns. It is all part of God's Kingdom work which He gives us to do.

Paul, in the final verses of our text from 1 Corinthians 15, envisions the Last Day as the moment when Christ's reign will be complete. It's the day when his selfless ministry of grace will be vindicated, and those of us who, like him, were ready and willing to lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel will be declared the winners. In Christ we are already victorious.

Amen