

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 for Christ the King Sunday
11.26.17 - Pastor Nate Scharf - St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran, New Ulm, Minnesota

Crown him with many crowns.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - ²⁰ *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹ *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* ²³ *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* ²⁴ *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.* ²⁵ *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* ²⁷ *For he "has put everything under his feet."* ²⁸ *Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

He looked at the fields he planted and thought, "Now we wait." The seeds of grain sprouted and poked through the soil well on their way to becoming mature plants. He readied his family and carts and set out for the Tabernacle to worship the one true God. He had their sacrifices for the altar and the priests. He had the lamb for their Passover celebration. Now he took two handfuls of those newly sprouted grains and ripped them from the ground to offer them on the altar of the LORD. This was for the festival of "*first fruits.*" With this offering the Old Testament worshipper acknowledged two things were true. 1) All they had were gifts from God who brings seedtime and harvest, clothes and feeds us with his bounty. And 2) God will grant the full harvest.

What about the New Testament worshipper. 1 Corinthians 15 points to Jesus as the victorious King. Jesus conquered in a peculiar way. He suffered, died and came alive again. He descended into hell to proclaim his victory, then came out of the grave. He appeared to over 500 people. He made doubters touch the nail marks in his hands and spear mark in his side. Eye-witnesses spread this news (some at the cost of their own lives), wrote it down for us to read 2000 years later, and the results still stand – Our sins were paid for on that cross. Death's sting is taken away through Jesus' physical resurrection. Through faith in Jesus we receive every blessing – forgiveness, life, strength and finally heaven. Two things are true for us, New Testament worshippers. 1) Every good thing we have is a gift from God. 2) God will grant the full harvest.

Hannah says I should take up lap swimming at the Vogel. It is a low contact way of getting in shape (struggling to keep yourself from drowning is absolutely good exercise). I am a decent swimmer and buoyant. But I fear swimming laps and this is why: I put my head down to swim in a line and whether I have goggles on or not I fail. I don't know how it happens, but it just does – you put your head down and suddenly you are in another person's lane, running into the wall, lane dividers or running into someone else. Finally you pick your head up and say, "How did I get here?"

Paul may have had similar sentiments when he had to say, *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..."* Paul must have said to himself, "How did we get here?" It was bad enough that the Corinthian congregation had been allowing and listening to false doctrine. But now they actually believed it, and even to the point that they thought that Jesus had not risen physically from the dead and there is no resurrection, period. Paul pointed them to eye witnesses they could ask if they didn't believe him. Paul made clear how foolish and worthless Christianity is if Jesus had not risen from the grave. Jesus rose, ascended. He lives. He's coming back. These are facts.

But this happens to us too - conscientious and well-intentioned Christians – we listen to a religious speaker or popular wisdom in person or on the radio, tv, internet and put the best spin on some wise and good sounding garbage that comes out, not realizing it is polluting us as we fail to discern garbage from truth. The sweet slither of our sinful nature says that our sin isn't so sinful anymore, or at least it can be tolerated. We fail to confront it, we even embrace it, and wonder why our lives, the words that come out of our mouths, maybe even our children don't seem to be Christ-centered or godly anymore. We look like the sinful world around us. And we are all too comfortable with it. Sin stinks. Or we have been duped to think we've made it and are good enough for God on our own. But our sin stinks and it damns. Pick your heads up, "How did we get here."

"Death came through a man..." No matter who you are, or what you have, or what you've accomplished in this life, death waits. It's a result of the sinfulness of mankind, even our own sins – a family tradition started by the patriarch and the matriarch – Adam and Eve. We don't do anyone any favors when we placate death by saying, "It's natural," or "A part of life." Death is not natural. It was never meant to be a part of life. It is a shocking statement of sin and its consequences every time it happens whether we think it is deserved or not. It always separates, always hurts. Death is our enemy. We look into the casket of a loved one and we think, "How did we get here?" And "I don't want to be here."

Paul's point is not to rub our faces in the dust, but to pick our heads up and say, "We know how we got here, but Look at where you are because Christ is our King. Look at what is coming." There will be no more scars in the ground marked by marble. No more weeping. No more bereavement days or cheap flights. No more separation. No more cemeteries. No more death. Only life. It sounds impossible. It can't be. All we know is death.

Jesus is life, physical, and eternal. Every funeral Jesus attended he ruined with life –often raising the dead. Even when he didn't raise the dead, he promised eternal life. A few moments after his legs were broken that repentant thief on the cross learned how true Jesus' promise was that he would be with his Savior in paradise. And on the last day, when Jesus returns, every grave will open, every urn will be vacated, every mortal body of every believer will be glorified in an instant never to feel or be weak, worried or outwitted again, never to sin or be affected by sin again.

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." The Israelite farmer threw the seedlings on the fire of the altar in thanks to God and in trust that God keeps his promises. The harvest would come. Jesus is the seedling thrown on that fire. Jesus is the first part. We are the harvest, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. All those who follow Jesus through faith will live, even if they die and their bodies lie in the ground for a few year. When he comes we will rise.

"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet."

What cemetery do you want to be near on the last day? St. Paul's cemetery? The Mount of Olives? Normandy? Gettysburg? 1 Arizona Memorial Place Honolulu Hawaii? We'll all be there at this great sight where Jesus hands the kingdom to his father. It's done. No more waiting.

The harvest will be in and not one grain head of grain left in the field. It will be perfect. *"When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."* When the end comes something amazing will happen – Jesus who rules over all things will come and death will be gone forever – the devil will no longer harass us, we will be released from our sinful natures, and the world will be burned up with fire and a new heaven and earth will be given to us. Nothing will ever harass us again. And

Jesus will place the kingdom under the feet of his Father in a final act of accomplishment – all done, nothing left to do but to enjoy his gifts, his bounty, bask in his love... Christ hands over the kingdom to his Father and they rule all visibly and perfectly for all eternity.

But since this will be and we know these are all ours, live it right now. Christ reigns in our hearts with his gifts of grace, forgiveness and love. We know we will see him visibly rule on the last day. But all this confidence, joy, contentment, peace and love are found and are ours in him now. So now we wait. And as we wait, we live. We worship him with hearts full of faith. We seek understanding from his Word. We fight the devil, the world and our own sinful nature. We say “no” to sin. We keep our heads up. We draw strength from our Savior and his Spirit which live in us.

Look at where you are and look at where you are going. Live in that joy and peace. Christ is the King. He is the first fruits. We are the harvest. Two things are true. 1) All this is a gift. 2) The best is yet to come. Keep your heads up and live in this. Amen.