

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Christ The King Weekend; November 26 & 27, 2023

“Christ the King” Sunday began to be celebrated in the Christian church in 1925 in Europe to counter what it regarded as the destructive forces of the modern world: secularism in the West, the rise of communism in Russia and Fascism in Italy and Spain, and Nazism that was soon going to seize Germany. The celebration was meant to assure and to comfort the Church that Jesus was still in control. Christ the King was meant to be a joyful celebration. On this last Sunday of the Church Year, we rejoice in the fulfillment of God’s plan of Salvation through Jesus, our King. We look forward to the day when every knee will bow with us before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Perhaps, that is why our Gospel Lesson for today seems somewhat out of place. At first, it seems like this account from Matthew should be read on Good Friday and not Christ the King Sunday. If we were standing there in that room with Jesus, we wouldn’t be all that joyful. Instead, I think, we may have tears rolling down our face. After all, here stands the one who created light from darkness and divided the land from the sea. He deserved the finest crown, not a crown of thorns. He deserved the finest scepter in his hand, instead he got a staff that they used to beat him. He deserved to have people bow down and worship him, instead he got spit upon and beaten. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords had come down to this earth to save mankind. Instead look at what he got in return. Yet, this scene is joyful because we know how it ends. The picture of our King wearing a crown of thorns is not tragic, but it is full of grace. There on that cross we see Christ the King who came as our sacrifice.

Yet, if the story of Christ ended on Good Friday, there could be no joy at all. Paul wanted these young believers in Corinth to know that Good Friday wasn’t the end, it was only just the beginning of a new chapter. **“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”**

The Corinthians were having a hard time with this whole idea of the Resurrection of the Dead. If you think about it, you can’t really blame them, can you? Dead people just don’t come back to life again. When you are dead, your body goes into the ground. And it stays there! As much as they might wish a loved one to come back to life, they knew that wishing doesn’t make it happen. Everything in their past bears that out. After all, how many people have you seen come back to life in the past 10 years? What would you think if your neighbor comes up to you and says: *“You know that guy that lived across the street, he died last Tuesday going outside to get the mail. The funeral and the burial were on Friday. But the funniest thing happened yesterday, he came back to life and rose right out of the ground.”* What would you say if someone told you that? *Yea, right?* Maybe, we can understand how the Corinthians were struggling with this whole idea of the Resurrection of the Dead.

If the bones of Jesus are still inside a tomb somewhere outside of Jerusalem, none of those promises that Jesus gave can be true. Why? It means that none of God’s promises can be trusted. BUT, if Jesus’ bones are not buried, and if his bones, along with the rest of his body, were raised back to life, and if he is alive and well this very day, then the Resurrection of Jesus changes everything. If that is true, then Jesus loves you more than you could possibly imagine. He loves you so much that he forgives each of your sins. It means that we can trust EVERY promise that God has given us. It means that these promises from God are not only for this life, but they will last an eternity. Then we have every reason to rejoice today on Christ the King Sunday.

Look back over the last year. Did you experience any uncertainties? Maybe you got a health diagnosis that you had not seen coming. Maybe the spouse that you had shared your life with for many years is now standing before the throne of Jesus in heaven. Maybe you have had a life filled with unbelievable amount of stress. Yet, as hard as they might be, we still have the hope of Jesus. That hope that we have in Jesus is all about the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

I don’t know if some of you watched several football games over the weekend. Even if you had or hadn’t, there is one thing that we all know – the football determines the outcome of the game. First downs are measured by where the ball is placed. Touchdowns are measured by whether the ball crosses the plain of the goal line. “Out of bounds” is tied to your control of the ball and its relationship to the feet of the person holding it. Fumbles are determined by who grabs the ball. Field goals are measured by whether the ball goes through the up rights or not. In other words, if the football is

missing, there is no football game. In football, the football is the main thing. In Christianity, the cross is the main thing. No cross, no hope of eternal life. As the Apostle Paul writes in the verses before our text: **“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”** But if Jesus is risen, then we have every reason in the world to celebrate Christ being our King. Then Paul can say: **“The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he has put everything under his feet.”**

Even if we look around this world and feel like hope isn't there anymore, trust in the true hope that God really gives you and what that means. This life cannot really hurt you. It can cause you pain and disappointment and frustration. Yet, we know that this life is only temporary, but the next life, that is something we can look forward to. Even if that sounds too good to be true, trust that this life to come is beyond anything that we can imagine. You see our joy is made complete in Christ the King. That is why the crucified Christ is the perfect picture of Christ the King. Amen.