

One Last Enemy

I Corinthians 15:20-28 (NIV)

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.” 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. ²⁸ 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.

We are in the End Times. Through the Bible readings over the last couple of Sundays we have seen the Christian Church – and by the Church I mean all the people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin – is marching to promised and inevitable victory led by our King, Jesus Christ. Jesus leads the Church today like a king of old, a king who went into battle with his soldiers and led the charge. We have seen his victories, which have in turn become our victories. Jesus led the charge against sin. The moment he came into our world as a baby born of the virgin Mary, he went into battle against sin and imperfection by fulfilling God’s law in every aspect and every way. As the perfect Lamb of God, he took on himself our sins and suffered for them, thus conquering our sin. At the same time he led the charge against the devil. He resisted all of our old evil foe’s temptations, never once backing down, never once giving in. He crushed Satan’s head with his death on the cross and his resurrection three days later.

Christ our King is still leading the charge today. Earthly powers and authorities rage against God, deny his existence trying to snuff out his power and influence. Yet, the Christian Church remains. Christ has not been contained. His Word, news of his victories, continues to spread each and every day. More and more people are coming to know Christ. Yes, the war for every single person’s souls still rages, but our King shows no signs of slowing down, no chinks in the armor, no possibility of defeat. The final target, the final enemy, is death.

How do you view death? Is death a natural part of our lives, the circle of life we might say? It seems logical that death is something natural because we were born into a world where there always has been death. As it seems to us, the natural order of things is that you are born, you grow up and get bigger, then your health begins to deteriorate, and after you have lived a good long, life full of years, then it’s time to die. It’s the way things are. It’s all we know. So we assume death is natural.

But ask a parent whose child has died, a parent who has miscarried, who lost a child in an accident, ask the person who is old and full of years, “Is death natural?” Maybe you get a sick feeling in your stomach thinking about asking these people that question. You know that they are going to say no. You’ll probably see tears, tears born of the heartache caused by death, statements of how this is not how it should be, the residual grief of death that maybe lessens in intensity at times but never truly leaves. It doesn’t matter the age of the person or the situation. You still cry when someone dies, even if you knew it was coming.

Our grief shows us that death is not natural. The pain of death screams to you that this isn’t right. And that’s what God tells us in his Word. He did not create us to die. After he was finished with the six days of creation, he planned and expected humankind to live forever, to live joyfully in this new world he created for us. But Adam and Eve brought death into the world. They knew the consequences. They had a choice. They chose to disobey. They chose death, the punishment for disobeying God, the punishment for being imperfect. They subjected the entire world to death, a pain we all experience. As Paul wrote, “Death came through a man... in Adam all die.” (verses 21, 22) People were not built to die.

At the same time, though, we cannot claim innocence and say that death is a punishment unfairly inflicted upon us. We know right from wrong and yet how many times have we chosen the wrong? We know that we can’t control our lustful thoughts, our feelings of anger or hatred or greed. Sometimes these thoughts spew out into action; other times we reel them in. Yet the fact remains that we have those thoughts. In God’s eyes, the thoughts are just as bad as the action. We have disobeyed, like Adam and Eve. We have sinned. We have chosen to disobey God. We have rightly earned this painful, unnatural thing we call death. As God tells us, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

Yes, death is painful, but sometimes we welcome it, don’t we? When the pain is too much and the hurt never goes away. When you feel like a forever failure, that you are a drain and a burden on the people you love, then death looks like a solution. It looks like a

way out, an escape. Maybe death isn't so bad. Death can end the pain, right? Death can give me relief. Death is like a welcomed friend, one who will take me on a journey away from the pain and suffering. This is why some people commit suicide. They see death as their only solution to the never-ending pain and the suffering. The person who commits suicide thinks that they are doing their loved ones a favor, relieving them of the burden that is their life and their problems. We welcome death in this way too as we watch our loved ones suffer terribly with no end in sight. We start to embrace death as if it's our friend.

Death is not your friend. Death is the wages of sin, the just and right punishment that all people experience because all of us are sinful. Death seeks to rip us away from everything good. Death wants to end our relationships with our family, with our friends, with God. Death doesn't care about you or your happiness. Death doesn't want to help you at all. Death wants to claim you and drag you away from anything good. Death is evil. It wants to destroy you. Death is our enemy, and we bought it on ourselves.

"But wait a minute, pastor. How can you say that there's nothing good about death? Death is a good thing, isn't it? Death is how we get to heaven; it's how we get to God. Death is like a doorway to life everlasting."

It's not death that brings us to God; it's God who brings us to God. Death is God's enemy. He says, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (verse 26) We know God's battle plan and strategy to destroy death. We have seen the first shots fired, the first victory won, the victory which signals the eventual and total victory to come at the hands of Christ our King.

On the cross on Good Friday, Christ our King looked battered, bruised, bloodied, and beaten. He did not look like a conquering or victorious king; he looked like a loser. Death looked like he had won. But after Jesus died carrying on his shoulders all the sins of all people of all time and paying for all of them, he raised his body back to life. Death was pushed aside, pushed under his feet. Death was defeated, and Jesus stood on top of him victorious, foot on top of his defeated enemy. Death could not control Christ and could not beat him. Death is defeated.

That first victory signaling the total victory to come for all of us was Christ's resurrection. "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." (verses 20, 21-23) Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, of those who have died. Just like the firstfruits of the harvest were a promise for the rest of the crops to come and be harvested, so also we are promised to have our bodies raised from the dead and made immortal. This will happen on the Last Day, the day Christ returns. And then, we will live forever in body and soul with God.

Because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, we know that we too will be raised from the dead – all of us. Death will on the Last Day, be completely wiped out, completely destroyed, vanquished forever. No one will ever have to go through the unnatural pain of losing a loved one, the pain of the body breaking down and life stopping. In fact, through Christ's resurrection our relationship with God is fixed, reconciled. Christ our King brought us in to a right relationship with him because he conquered sin, the devil, and death by his perfect life and death on the cross. Those who believe this have that same right relationship with God. They will experience the joy of this everlasting, perfect relationship with him. We will be gathered body and soul to be forever with the saints who have gone before us. Those relationships will never be broken by death. Never again will we even think that we are a burden to our loved ones. Never again will we look for an escape from pain and sadness because those feelings will be completely done away with.

On the Last Day with the resurrection of all the dead, no one will ever die again. God will make our bodies immortal, unable to break down, unable to get weary and hurting and achy. Instead, we will live forever with no more aches or pains. Never again will any of us experience death. Death will be completely destroyed. Death will never again dictate your life because Christ is our King.

Christ our King is our victorious King, and his victories never end. He is in control right now. He is reigning over everything, including death, so that what he said will happen. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (verse 26) We already know that Christ our King is victorious over death. On the Last Day when he returns, he will destroy it completely. So, come, Lord Jesus. Come, Christ our King, and destroy death, our enemy. Amen.