

November 26, 2023 (Christ the King - A)

1 Corinthians 15:20-28
“The CONQUERING King!”

When you get a picture of **Jesus** in your head . . . what did you see Him doing? (*Perhaps ruling in glory, after all, if you’ve been paying attention at all, it’s Christ the King Sunday! Maybe you saw Him healing someone. Christmas is coming, perhaps you got a picture of him in the manger as a baby. Did you see Him on the cross? With children on his lap? Or maybe you thought of Him, risen from the dead on Easter Sunday, showing his disciples his hands and feet?*)

In our Wednesday Genesis Bible class we saw Him **wrestling** with Jacob – Martin Luther called this chapter the most obscure text in the Old Testament, because he just couldn’t imagine Jesus having a wrestling match with Jacob throughout the middle of the night.

Our text is from **1 Corinthians** and some people in the Corinthian congregation had a real problem trying to imagine Christ – physically / bodily risen from the dead. To them “rising from the dead” was totally at odds with the prevailing (gnostic influenced) mindset of the time. People wanted to escape their physical bodies and they couldn’t understand the concept of “resurrection”. But . . . Paul knew that He DID rise from the dead – and this whole chapter of 1 Corinthians discusses the central importance (and relevance) of Jesus’ resurrection. Paul tells us what it means for us believers.

We might not have a problem visualizing Jesus alive again on Easter Sunday (or even wrestling with Jacob) – but . . . these verses before us **do** describe Jesus in a way that’s hard for us to picture. *How many of you brought to mind a picture of Jesus **fighting**?* We’re influenced by our culture too – and our culture thinks fighting is wrong and to be avoided, if possible, at all costs. We don’t usually think of Jesus that way, but our lesson for today DOES describe our King as a **Conquering King**.

Adam had cursed our world with sin, and evil / death, and destruction. But – Christ, our King, FOUGHT with every ounce of strength and life in Him to break that curse and rescue us from hell. He fought through all the traps of His enemies and all the temptations of the devil. He fought right through the torture and agony of Good Friday; He fought through death itself until His victory on Easter Sunday. Paul tells us about the ongoing battles our **Conquering King** is waging (and winning) as we get ever closer to the End.

1 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.

He fought for our souls and the salvation of mankind – and, He won that monumental battle . . . but, He is **still fighting!** He’s fighting for souls through every moment of history right up to this very day, and He will keep on fighting until the war is won. His enemies are fighting back, and fighting hard, and they will not give up either – they will fight on until the very last second. . . . (*Paul goes on*) . . . **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.**

He is fighting against the lies / the power / the authorities of THIS world that are in league with Satan. Our Conquering King will ultimately destroy it all, including the greatest enemy of us all: DEATH. On that Day He will destroy the planet and vanquish all His foes . . . without even breaking a sweat. On THAT Day His unbelievable POWER will be unleashed upon all that is evil in this world. He is indeed a **fighter** – a **Conquering King**, but He won’t unleash His **destructive** power until the very End. Throughout history He’s been fighting in a totally *different way*, and with totally different weapons. He’s not your typical King and He doesn’t fight with your typical weapons. The weapons Jesus uses to fight His battles over the souls of mankind are: righteousness, truth, and love.

You know how He defeated the curse of Adam: He did what was **right** – 100% of the time as our perfect substitute / He told the **truth** 100% of the time, no matter what the consequences were / in **love** He offered Himself 100% as the sacrifice for our sins to wipe them out forever. He still is fighting to win souls for His family – but He only fights with **righteousness, truth, and love** – the same weapons He’s been using to fight Satan throughout history. Those weapons are the weapons He has placed in **our hands** when we became His followers and foot

soldiers – people who are, along with Him, fighting for His Kingdom and fighting to win souls for our King.

But – here’s where we find a major breakdown in command, and things tend to fall apart in this grand crusade to win souls for Christ our King. *What happens?* It doesn’t make any sense, but *His* people refuse to **use** the weapons He has given them and trained them to use.

- He says, **“Do what is right!”** And His people all too often say, *“Yeah . . . that’s not going to work for me – at least, not in this circumstance. I know it’s wrong – but it’s just so much fun! It’s easier! It’s better this way – everyone else is doing it!”* And . . . we so often wind up doing what is wrong, instead of what is right.
- He orders us to: **“Tell the TRUTH – the whole truth, God’s truth, and nothing but that truth!”** And – we, his foot soldiers often reply, *“Umm . . . yeah . . . we can’t do that. It might get us in trouble. It might offend someone. It’s so much easier just to lie about it / to twist the truth so we come out looking better / to keep the truth to ourselves so we don’t start an uncomfortable conversation.”* So . . . we often set the truth aside.
- He tells us to: **“Love others more than you love yourself, and even love your enemies!”** But . . . it’s just so much easier and so much more fun to love *ourselves* instead. So – we forget about “them” and start thinking what **I** want / what makes **me** happy / what serves **my** needs. Love only works as it’s intended to when it’s directed **OUT**. If we turn it around and direct it at ourselves – it’s useless, and destructive, and accomplishes nothing good.

It doesn’t make any sense, but it’s like we say – *“Yes, those tools / those weapons worked GREAT for Jesus – He used them to destroy the curse of Adam and break the devil’s power while rescuing countless souls . . . but . . . they don’t work for me.”* So, instead, we are selfish / we bend, twist, distort, or obliterate the truth / and we do what is wrong – and – we just make a mess of things, we wind up fighting for the wrong side, going along with everyone else, wasting the opportunities God gives us, and ultimately regretting it.

Time and time again we wind up on our knees in repentance over how we have failed to serve and defend our King. Time and time again we find ourselves begging our King to give us another chance and not to give up on us. Amazingly *THIS King* is boundless in His grace and mercy – and He never turns away anyone **repents** and comes in faith to Him. He forgives you and still wants you on His side. He still has a valuable role for **YOU** in the ongoing fight over the souls of mankind.

Therefore consider again **how** Christ – the *Conquering King* – fought and won all His battles: He always did what was right. He always told the truth, no matter how hard it was to do so. He had so much love for His enemies that He was even willing to be tortured and killed for them (and us). And – *did He prevail in the end?* **Yes!** His resurrection is **PROOF** of His victory / **PROOF** that His weapons actually do work / proof that forgiveness and eternal salvation are actually ours!

So . . . connect the dots people! It worked for Christ our King, and it will work for you and me too. You can actually **DO the right thing!** Even if no one else does / even if it’s really hard / even if it seems impossible / even if it costs you everything! You can actually **tell the truth!** Even if it makes people uncomfortable / even if it gets you in trouble / even if it makes you unpopular . . . ALL the time! You are free to give up on trying to please yourself and show **love** to others instead! Even if they don’t deserve it / even if they don’t love you back / even if they never thank you / even if they’re your enemies / even if it costs you everything!

It worked for Christ, and it’ll work for you and me too!

But . . . *um . . . Pastor H – that sounds really hard to do.* Yeah. It wasn’t easy for our King, and it won’t be easy for us either. But – those who fight for what is right / who fight for the truth / who fight for what is loving – will ultimately prevail! Christ, and everyone on His side, will be victorious in the end. And, on *that Day*, everything will **change** – not only for us, but also for our King: **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.**

If that sounds confusing to us, it’s because we still, like the Corinthians, are influenced heavily by our society. It sounds strange because we may still have a problem with this whole concept of “submission” and “roles”. Our Conquering King will change roles on that Day – and, it’s not a bad thing, *it’s a great thing!* He will still be a King of Righteousness, Truth, and Love – but, He will no longer have to fight. And . . . neither will we. The conflict will be over. Our victorious Lord will usher in an age of peace that will never end. My friends – keep on fighting with your King, using only the weapons He has given us, until that Great Day comes. Amen.