

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Christ the King**

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

“Who Is Really In Control?”

Terrible situations lead us to question:

- 1. A Time is Coming***
- 2. That Time is Not Yet***

Hymns: 341 – 728

Distribution: 217 – 370

Closing: 219

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

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. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 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.” 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.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Tough situations often lead us to ask questions. For the prophet Elijah, the situation which made him ask questions was sitting under a desolate broom tree in the middle of the desert waiting for death. More specifically, it was all the events that led him to this desert that had him asking questions. See, Elijah had just stood on top of a mountain, toe to toe with 400 false prophets of Ahab, King of Israel. And he had just taken them to the cleaners. God had

shown the false prophets and the rest of Israel who was true God. And it seemed like the people had responded. They put every last one of the 400 false prophets to death and they vowed their allegiance to God. For the first time in a long time, it seemed to Elijah like the people of Israel were turning the corner in their battle with idolatry. But that was before King Ahab had responded to the slaughter of his false prophets with a promise of retaliation and revenge for anyone who associated himself with Elijah and the true God. So, now Elijah was by himself, fleeing for his life, stranded in the desert, in a terrible situation. He had just followed his boss’ order and, as a result, there was now a bounty on his head. And it led him to ask questions. As Elijah sat there in the desert, all of his thoughts could be boiled down to one question, “Who is really in control?”

Has anything in your life ever stirred you to ask that question, “Who is really in control?” There are certainly a host of things in this world that might lead us to that question of despair. Perhaps you wonder about control as you watch the news at night; as you see terrible things happen in the world. There, each night, you hear about senseless murders, children being abused, and other forms of evil around the world that maybe make you wonder if the devil is really in complete control of it all. Or maybe you wonder about who is in control as you look and see troubling things happening in the church. There you find people entrusted with the Gospel who distort it to fit what they want to hear or who dishonor it by living lives which bring God’s work under attack.

Or perhaps, and maybe most likely, it has been a personal trouble that has led you to that despondent question, “Who is really in control?” When untimely illnesses, unexpected job losses, broken relationships, economic hardships or any number of other trials hit, it becomes rather easy to have doubts about who is in control. It is easy to have doubts about whether God truly cares. At those times of pain, we’d like to hold unswervingly to Jesus’ promise that he is working for our good, but it is very easy to doubt because of what we see and feel and experience. The pains of life, the ugliness of a corrupt world, the tragic events; those things can make it very difficult to trust that Christ is up on his throne ruling over all things.

If that is something that Christians struggle with from time to time, imagine what must go through unbelievers minds when they think about God and his control in the face of tragedy and hardship. The truth of that matter is that sometimes it is very difficult to fathom that Christ is ruling as King and that he is in control of everything.

However, a time is coming when the answer of who is in control and who has been in control will

be fully known to each and every person. On the Last Day, when Jesus comes again, every person will know without a shadow of a doubt, that Christ is King over all the earth. In the past few weeks during these End Times Sundays at the end of the church year, we have caught glimpses of the awe, wonder and glory that will surround the great Day of Judgment. We have heard how the saints triumphant will join with the angels of heaven to sing praises to God and shout, "Hallelujah!" Daniel described the powerful displays of fire and light that will surround the throne of God. And here in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us something else that will be abundantly clear on that day.

He says that on the last day, every dominion, authority, and power will have been destroyed. Throughout the course of human history, control of the world has seemed to be in the hands of men who inhabit the earth. A study of history is really a study of who is in control, which empire shaped which time period, and how did that affect mankind. We are told here that someday soon, all human rule will cease. No longer will conquering emperors bring destruction or oppression into the world. No longer will godless governments affect Christ's kingdom in a negative way. No longer will Christians need to put on the full armor of God as they battle against those who have no care about God. All earthly rule, authority and power which hinders Christ kingdom will be abolished.

And all spiritual enemies will be brought to an end as well. Paul says that the ultimate sign of Christ's rule will be when death is destroyed and completely done away with. We can look forward to a day when death is no longer something that waits in every person's future. None of the fear will be there. None of the sadness will be there. None of the pain and loss will be there. A world without death is impossible for us to imagine, but that day when it is no more will show Christ the King's ultimate authority and victory. And Paul's words are clear; that day WILL happen. Christ's rule will be carried to completion and we will see that culmination on Judgment Day.

But until that time, there will continue to be things that seek to have us doubt Christ's control. And those doubts begin with the devil. Though his feet are chained firmly in hell, his fingers remain in this world, carrying out his cunning lies. By his evil work in this world, that work which we see every day, he stirs up doubts and seeks to confuse our hearts. And as long as the devil is around, sin will also be here to lead us astray. And though death will one day be completely destroyed and done, it remains here as that terrible result of sin. And it does cause us sadness; it does continue to hurt us. It does make us

fearful from time to time. Every time we face death in our lives, the devil uses it to shake our confidence in the final outcome that we know is coming. And the tough part in all of this for Christians is that as humans we want something real to hold onto. The promise of Christ's ultimate show of victory on the Last Day is nice, but the apparent control of sin, death and the devil are in front of us right now; and their control can seem a lot more sure than the time in the future when they will be completely under Jesus' feet.

So what can we hold onto for confidence until that day when Christ the King comes? For the prophet Elijah, the Lord gave him a powerful sign. As Elijah sat and wondered if God were really in control and if he was really holding to his promises, God showed him in a most fitting way. God was going to appear before Elijah and show him why he could trust God. So as Elijah waited for the Lord, a tremendous wind that broke apart rocks came and passed by Elijah, then a great earthquake came, and finally fire passed by. Those mighty acts would've been fitting ways for the Lord Almighty to show Elijah that he was in control, but God wasn't in any of them. Instead, God came to Elijah in a way that he wasn't expecting. God passed by Elijah as a gentle whisper. What a powerful reminder to Elijah that it is sometimes hard to comprehend how God is working his control in each and every situation. Sometimes, like a quiet whisper, his presence is subtle, but he is always there. Through this display, God showed Elijah that he was in control and I doubt that Elijah ever forgot it.

As powerful as that sign was for Elijah, Christ has given us a powerful assurance that he is in absolute control even now, no matter what we see in the world around us. That assurance is found in Christ's own resurrection from the dead. That is what the Apostle Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians of as he spoke to them in this great resurrection chapter. He was speaking to Christians who were taking their stand in a corrupt world. They were people who would see Christianity attacked and persecuted. He wanted to assure them that Christ was in control and they could hold firmly to that fact as they lived as the church militant, fighting for their faith. And the resurrection on Easter Sunday provided them what they needed. And it also provides us with what we need, because we also are Christians taking our stand in a corrupt world, we are the church militant.

And to remember that Christ is in complete control right now, we must remember what Christ the King's resurrection means. First and foremost, it means that the sacrifice for sins that Christ made on the cross was accepted by God the Father. It means without a shadow of a doubt that all of your sins have

been forgiven; your sins of doubt, your sins of fear, your sins of anger, they have been wiped away. And Christ's resurrection means that you too shall rise from death. Paul says it beautifully, "Christ the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him." And while that once again gives us future hope, the resurrection also gives assurance of something that is happening right now.

Christ was raised to rule. On that day of resurrection, his rule over the powers of sin, death, and the devil were confirmed. Jesus went down into hell to declare victory and to tell the devil and all those with him that he was in control for eternity. And God brought Jesus to his right hand and put him in control of all things.

And the obvious question out of that is, "Why did Jesus' victory not mark the end?" And the wonderful answer to that is you and I. Though Christ won the victory long ago, the work of grace has not been brought to completion. God's kingdom is still being gathered. Saints are still being brought to faith, plucked from the darkness of the world into the light of the Kingdom of God.

And while that means that sin, death, and the devil continue to be around, the knowledge of why it all happens will change how we view things. Knowing that Christ is truly in control and that he has all his enemies under his feet can take away the terror of the devil, the burden of sin and the fear of death.

The fact that Christ has already been raised to life gives us this great assurance. It proclaims loudly that Christ is King, and there is nothing that can dispute that, because his enemies have been defeated. Let the assurance of Christ's resurrection fill you with unwavering confidence that he really is in control. Amen.