Today is the last Sunday in the church year. Today we celebrate Jesus as Christ the King. The Bible praises the deity of God in “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time -- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in approachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Tim 6:15f). This passage among others shows that Jesus our King is powerful and invincible.

When Christ our King returns in glory, he will conquer all enemies. Our text mentions three enemies that Christ will conquer. The first enemy is sin, and since Christ died on the cross and is arisen, sin has already been conquered. Second, the enemies of the gospel will succumb. Third, death itself will be destroyed.

Our King will conquer three enemies. Since Christ is arisen, our first enemy sin is powerless. Christ, the Lord’s Anointed, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise has indeed been raised from the dead. Christ is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The first fruits is the first offering of a new harvest. It is a sign and token that the whole harvest belonged to the Lord. The Lord told Moses, “When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest” (Lev 23:10). The first sheaf was harvested when the entire harvest is ripe and ready and will be followed by other sheaves. Christ was raised first so he is the firstborn among the dead and at his second coming believers in Christ will be awakened from the dead. In his vision from God the apostle John offers grace and peace “from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5).

Sin and death came through a man. In him we all die. We know the man -- Adam, we know the place -- the Garden of Eden, we know the words -- “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die” (Gn 2:17). When Adam and Eve listened to the devil, they would die. Adam was the means by which death entered into the world. His sin subjected all mankind to physical death.

The law of God clearly states “the soul who sins is the one who will die” (Eze 18:4). Adam and Eve sinned, so eventually they died. “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gn 3:19a). We have sinned, so eventually we will die. Through Adam’s sin death entered the world. “Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). The law shows us that we need help to free us from sin and death.

Paul tells us, “Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” Jesus by his resurrection has broken the stranglehold of sin and death. His death on the cross paid for the world’s sin when Jesus declared, “It is finished.” His mission was completed when “God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Ac 2:24). “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Christ will do a marvelous thing, he will enliven those who belong to Christ after death. The resurrection of the dead will take place when Christ comes again. The Greek word for “coming” was used for the arrival of dignitaries. How fitting a term for Christ’s return, when he comes as King with all his holy angels!

When Christ comes again, our bodies will leave the pit of the grave and the dust of the earth to greet our King who has defeated sin and death for us! Because Jesus has been raised, Christ is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Jesus called death sleep at the death of a young girl, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep” (Mt 9:24). Later, Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up...Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep” (Jn 11:11,13). When Stephen was being stoned, he cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”
When he said this, Luke writes, “he fell asleep” (Ac 7:60). Later in this letter Paul writes, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor 15:51f). So we may call a Christian’s death a sleep. This means that Lois Kraus and Dale Lorfield are just sleeping, waiting to be awakened by their King on the Last Day. This means that we don’t need to fear death. Because a Christian’s death is just sleep, one day we may fall asleep in Jesus’ arms and wait for him to wake us up to enjoy eternal life with our King.

Powerful kings and kingdoms have enemies. Rulers of other nations who are jealous of their wealth and want to usurp their power will attack. Our King also has spiritual enemies. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

The enemies of the gospel will succumb to Christ our King. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (I Jn 3:8). Christ’s return for the final judgment means the conclusion to the history of the world. Christ will abolish all forces of every rule, every authority, and every power. Christ’s coming will bring an end to all the spiritual enemies who threaten us and try to dominate us. Christ will completely remove the power of Satan, sin, death and all misery and suffering. For Christians the end will mark the beginning -- the commencement of joy, blessedness and eternal life with Christ. Jesus spoke about his defeat of Satan, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven…I have given you authority...to overcome all the power of the enemy...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:18-20). While their power has been destroyed already, all the effects of those enemies will be completely removed. “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:13-15).

Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. Paul is not quoting Ps 110:1 which states, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”, but rather is restating its contents. His point is that God puts these enemies under Christ’s feet by making Christ the all-powerful Ruler and King. On that day Christ the King will have completely conquered all hostile forces and only then will he hand full authority over to the Father.

Christ the King will make the enemies of the gospel succumb to him. Christ will abolish all forces of evil that oppose his work of grace. No matter how firmly fixed their rule, how extensive their authority, how great their power seems to be, Christ will conquer. The power of sin, death and the devil will be broken utterly and forever so that they shall not rise from the ground or shake a finger against the King. Christ is adding souls to his kingdom of grace making intercession for those admitted under his rule by faith. The Church Militant will be changed into the Church Triumphant and the Kingdom of Glory will inaugurate God’s kingdom.

As some of you know, last Sunday I was asked to perform a wedding for a sister’s friend in Naples, Florida. What you may not know is the wedding ceremony took place in the courtyard at the elegant and extravagant Ritz-Carlton Beach Hotel. All weekend I was treated like royalty, like a king. In fact, many of the wedding guests felt slightly underdressed when they entered the hotel lobby. Cutoff shorts and T-shirts are frowned upon. While I felt like a king because of the elegant surroundings and the exceptional service, Christ is the true King. He endured suffering, mocking with the chants, “Hail, king of the Jews” and a cruel death. Christ has conquered all his enemies and put them under his feet.

Many people say death is natural, or a logical counterpart to life, based on the cycles of nature, but the Bible says death is unnatural. When God created the world and everything in it, there was no death. Death only entered the world when Adam sinned. Death is anything but natural, in fact it is an enemy.

Our King will conquer death. For death itself will be the last the ultimate, enemy to be
destroyed. Death, naturally last, reaches the climax of the destructive work of all the other hostile powers. Thanks be to God, that it has been conquered since Christ has been risen from the dead. This destruction of death will occur at the end, at Christ’s second coming, after Christ conquers his enemies at the great white throne of judgment. Jesus said, “The Son of Man must be lifted up” (Jn 3:14). Even after the resurrection the disciples “did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead” (Jn 20:9). When Christ returns, death’s power will be annulled forever.

Finally, the Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into eternity, a glance beyond the kingdom of grace and into the kingdom of glory. The Son will be made subject to the Father. After he subjects everything to his power with one exception, he will then turn it over to the Father. Verse 27 quotes the Messianic Psalm 8:6, “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.” On Palm Sunday Jesus used this psalm to quote how children would praise him and the writer to the Hebrews uses Psalm 8 to show how it speaks of Jesus. Because he, “Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, is now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9). The Triune God will be supreme and sovereign in everything.

Death is our last great obstacle. Our king conquered our last great enemy. Jesus suffered so we might live. Christ’s victory over death took away its sting. Luther commented on this text, “For a Christian has no joy or comfort except alone in the life hereafter, as he hears this article, that Christ is risen from the dead, that he also will raise him and bring him from death and all unhappiness to eternal joy” (Verlag der Evangelischen Beucherstiftung, 1866 p. 332). A sunset in one land is a sunrise in another. Death is only life, beginning in another realm. Death is not the end; it is only a beginning. Death is not the master of the house; he is only the porter at the King’s lodge, appointed to open the door and let the King’s guests into the realm of eternal day. And so shall we ever be with the Lord states J. W. Jowett. Luther also writes: “What is our death but a night’s sleep? For as through sleep all the weariness and faintness pass away and cease, and the power of the spirit comes back again, so that in the morning we rise, fresh and strong and joyous, so at the Last Day we shall rise again as if we had only slept a night, and shall be fresh and strong.”

Christ is our King, the Anointed One, the Messiah. His merciful sacrifice conquered sin, his gracious resurrection removed death’s sting, his almighty power will defeat the gospel’s spiritual enemies on the Last Day. When Napoleon was banished to a lonely prison on the island of St. Helens, he said, “There is no possible term of comparison between Jesus Christ and every other person in the world. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded empires. But on what did we found them? Upon force. But Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him” (Rein, 660, p.173). Our King conquers his enemies through love. Amen.