

Sunday, November 26, 2017 – Last Sunday of the Church Year
“Acting Like Winners”

1 Corinthians 15: 20-28

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

If you're like me, you enjoy watching football, whether on TV or in person. You also know that some games are over by the half because one of the teams has built up a seemingly insurmountable lead. By this time of year, certain teams already have such a bad record that they have little or no hope of making the playoffs. As they play, teams on the short end of things often only “go through the motions” or even quit, thus confirming to themselves and everyone else that they are “losers.” Other teams in the same predicament keep playing “hard” in order to keep the respect of their opponents and their fans. Defeat may be inevitable – nevertheless, teams with this kind of attitude go out looking like “winners.”

Life in this world is not a football game. But the question remains, “What is the Christian attitude toward life?” This morning our text from 1 Corinthians 15 surveys the entire playing field of human existence, stretching from Easter morning until the day when Jesus returns as the King of glory. He not only makes the argument that Christ must rule but also invites us, in this day and time to help spread the rule of Jesus. What in the world does that look like? How can we do that? Despite tons of evidence of defeat in the world around us and in our own lives, we can, in fact, act like winners.

To be sure that Jesus must rule at the end, we keep circling back to Easter morning and the empty tomb. Nothing is more important to the Christian faith than Jesus' resurrection. And I'm not talking about a metaphor or an analogy here, I mean a dead, stiff, stinking body had new life come back into it. Paul goes so far as to say that without this resurrection event, you're wasting your time with Christianity. There's a piece of physical evidence that a person could supply that would leave me to resign this pulpit and ask you all to leave and tell you we've all made a big mistake. Find me the bones of Jesus, the physical remains of the man who claimed to be God now resurrected and living, to prove to me that He died and stayed buried in that tomb and I'd be done here. That's how important the resurrection is. Every Sunday for Christians is mini-Easter celebration.

More than that, Jesus didn't just rise for Himself. He did it to foreshadow OUR resurrection on the Last Day. Paul calls Him the "firstfruits," that you and me will see the same thing happen whether it's a dead, stiff, stinking corpse or bones long since turned to dust.

There's an old spiritual called "Were You There When they Crucified My Lord?" It's stirring because it makes so clear it was our sins that put Jesus on the cross but sometimes we forget the last stanza, which asks another question – "Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?" Jesus' resurrection is the deposit, the payment for our bodies to rise!

Since Jesus rules, we can also believe that He'll have victory over everything that stands against Him. Paul gives an enemy list of opponents to Jesus – all "dominion, authority and power." Some of these opponents are supernatural – the devil and His angels. Others, like the list Jesus gives in Matthew 25 are natural – hunger, poverty, homelessness, sickness, violence. The last, and greatest of the opponents is death itself. Death, that separates us from each other and even those who have the hope of resurrection like you and me know firsthand the pain and grief that this brings. But "death" can encompass more than the a doctor declaring someone dead. Sometimes we experience the loss of the same person more than once.

Alzheimer's is a cruel disease. Patients become disoriented with respect to time, place and person. Some keep a memory of skills learned in the past, or names and faces and dates from long ago, but newer skills or facts or memories just won't stick. And often people with this disease suffer from depression and personality change, and perhaps even the inability to remember their own spouse and children. The victim of Alzheimer's continues to live but for the family, the person they once knew and loved has in some way already died.

Take heart – Jesus will win over every opponent to His rule. Ever since Jesus ascended into Heaven He has been ruling. Already pieces are being moved to exactly the right places for His return. Yes, even you and me and the events of our lives are being used to extend Jesus' rule, today.

For that reason we don't have to give up and act like losers. With Jesus ruling, we can act like winners. God supplies all the strength for this. Baptism is a place where Jesus gives you the ability to conquer the enemy inside you, your own sin – even though we sin every day, we repent, asking God's forgiveness and are given the strength to try again without fear of messing

up but with joy to know that God is ruling in us. And God puts us together with other Christians and creates countless opportunities for us to love others and pour into them – this is why we do Bible studies and are getting small groups off the ground and gather together to pray – did you know there's a group that meets every Sunday after 8am service, right back in that cry room to pray? It's true, and I know they'd be happy for you to join them.

And God puts us here for His rule to spread around us, too – in the northwest of Las Vegas, to help feed the hungry and look after the lonely and care for others who have need. I see it in Serve Day and the Rescue Mission and the Angel Tree and Operation Christmas Child, just to name a few recent things happening at Mountain View. And when you love your family well and your neighbors well and your coworkers and clients and customers and patients and students well – you're adding another square foot to the kingdom over which Jesus rules!

In the last verses of our text, Paul envisions the Last Day as a moment when Jesus' rule will be complete. It's the day when He will declare victory – and you and I, whatever we might lose today, will be winners. In Jesus' name, Amen.