King of kings and Lord of lords

A Sermon for Christ the King Sunday

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the high point of the church year, when we proclaim high and low, near and far, that in spite of all appearances to the contrary, Christ is King of heaven and earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and there is none beside him.

Today marks the end of the church year, and it reminds that things will come to an end for us individually, and that they will also come to an end for the whole of creation. He who will bring it to its end is the one who brought it into being.

He is the Alpha and the Omega. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

Genesis 1 begins: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving for the face of the waters. And God said: "Let there be light. And God saw the light was good" (Genesis 1: 1-4a).

He who created everything out of nothing is also the Lord who brings it to an end, and we think of this today, the end of the church year. The whole cosmos will come to an end. History will come to an end.

But there's another meaning to the word "end," that is, the goal, the goal toward which things are moving, the goal or purpose for which something is made.

What is God's will for us? His goal? The goal for you and me is that the Lord has made us his own in Baptism. The Lord, who made everything that is, has a purpose, a purpose for the cosmos and a purpose for each of us. And it makes it happen. He brings it all to its fulfillment and goal because he is the Almighty.

The Almighty is also the great shepherd, spoken of in Ezekiel 34:

> "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. . . . I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness . . . I will feed them . . . I will seek the lost . . . bring back the strayed . . . bind up the crippled . . . strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will watch over."

The Almighty protects the safety and life of his sheep. He gives them green pastures and clear waters.

A similar image of the Almighty and his protection is that of sitting in safety under one's own vine and fig tree. Back in 1790, George Washington wrote to a Jewish congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, assuring them of their safety in this new land. He ended his letter with a quote from Old Testament about the Almighty: "Everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken." (Micah 4:4, 1 Kings 4:25, Zechariah 3:10).

The Lord Almighty, the great shepherd, has spoken.

And in the New Testament the great shepherd becomes the Good Shepherd, spoken of in John 10:

> "I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

The Almighty is the Good Shepherd.

Christ the King is the Good Shepherd of the Twenty-Third Psalm, which begins: "The Lord is my shepherd." We sometimes don't think of the fact that in the last two verses of that Psalm, the image changes to that of a great banquet. The Good Shepherd is the Lord of the banquet. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows."

He takes care of us not in the valley of deep darkness and in the shadow of death, and he does so to bring us mercy and life. He lays out a banquet before us that we might eat and live.

And in this world, in the presence of our enemies, we gather round the Lord's Supper. He, our living Lord, is present here, giving us his body and blood, his mercy, forgiveness, and giving us a foretaste of the feast, the great banquet to come.

Psalm 95, our Psalm for today, reminds us that the Lord is our Maker, our Creator, the one who is in charge. "O come, let us sing to the Lord . . . For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods . . . For he is our God, and we are the people of

his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Psalm 95:1-7). He is the Lord of Lords and King of kings, and when we hear the phrase "Lord of lords, and King of Kings," we can't help but sing, silently or aloud, that great stanza from Handel's Messiah.

Ephesians 1 speaks of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who raised Jesus from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion."

When Paul writes about the end in 1 Corinthians, he does two significant things. He first writes: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26).

That's counter-intuitive. That goes against what people commonly think. They think that death is normal, just one of those things. But that's not right. That's not what God's plan has been. In his original plan there was to be no death.

But because of sin, the Lord came up with Plan B. We remember that sin, death, and the devil are all intertwined, are all finally the same thing.

In Plan B he himself came to solve the problem of sin and death and he did it his way, on the cross. Who could imagine that his kingship, his Lordship would be established like this. That's what the sign of the cross means: Christ is King.

And in his kingdom to come, his new heaven and earth, death will be no more.

Paul then concludes in 1 Corinthians 15:28 with this: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone." Ephesians 1:22-23 echoes this: "He has put all things under his feet . . . and has made him head over all things, he who fills all in all."

He is Lord, and it is great that we are his, because the Lord is Lord and not somebody else.

Finally, we think of the Lord's Prayer. We pray: "Thy kingdom come." As Luther writes: "God's kingdom comes by itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us."

He goes on in the Large Catechism to say that this is the most important petition because when his kingdom comes that is everything, a new heaven and earth, a new Jerusalem. Streams of living water.

The Lord's Prayer goes on to say: "Thy will be done." That's important for us because we basically say: "My will be done."

Luther's explanation goes on to say: "To be sure, the good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer, but we pray that it may also be done by us." We celebrate the fact that he is the King who brings in his kingdom and his will is done.

This brings us to the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are confessing that his is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

It concludes, as we know, with Amen, which means Yes! It is true! We acclaim that God's kingdom and power and glory are forever and ever and so we say "Amen."

Or to put it another way, as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 1:20: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God."

Come, let us worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, the holiness of his cross and resurrection. Christ is King, King of kings and Lord of lords, and "all the promises of God find their Yes in him." Amen