

Text: Psalm 110:1-3.

Ascension.

May 10, 2018.

God's love is yours through our Ascended Savior, Jesus. Amen.

I have a confession to make. I'm a competitive person. I hate to lose. Always have. Ask my mother. No, don't ask her. You wouldn't want me to be your pastor anymore. And it's tough to be a competitive person and a Christian today. It seems like we are on the losing team. Christian churches in the United States are shrinking. Our synod is losing members at an alarming rate. If things continue at their current rate, in 40 years, our synod will be half its current size. Even something as simple as a ChickFila store opening in New York draws the ire of a major publication. The article said, "This is insidious infiltration of a Christian organization. These cows are the covert evangelists, trying to weasel their Christian ways into our secular city." And then to make things worse, the day to celebrate Christ's victory, his Ascension into heaven, return to full glory, sitting at God's right hand, gets lost. Lost as the snow has finally melted. Lost in the busyness of spring. Lost on a Thursday night. Jesus, couldn't you have picked a better time to Ascend? There's no Ascension Day cards, or gifts, not even a special Ascension Day buffet at your neighborhood restaurant. It's tough for a competitive person like myself to watch Christians keep on losing.

But you know what Ascension Day says? We win! Christ won! Christ rules! Christ lives! Those who side with Jesus are the real winners, in spite of what seems like defeat here and now. Christ has already won. He has already placed all his enemies under his feet. Our victory in heaven is just as certain. Our ticker tape parade in heaven is already ready. The victory is not based on popularity. It's based on Jesus. Doesn't matter whether or not there's an Ascension Day sale. It matters that Jesus already paid the price, in full, to win you. He went to heaven to get your mansion ready. He's ruling all things, even the small defeats, for your eternal good. Jesus wins! Christ rules. You win. Christians rule.

Jesus is the LORD. The LORD, all capital letters, the God who is unchanging and perfect love, this LORD says to my Lord. Jesus himself quoted this verse and pointed to himself as the LORD. You realize what that makes Jesus? One of three things. Either he's a liar who claimed to be the LORD when he wasn't. Or he's a lunatic, who thought he was the LORD when he wasn't. Or else, he's the LORD. Liar, lunatic, or LORD. Which is he?

He's the LORD who sat at God's right hand. Sitting means his work is done. Perfect life? Check. Death for all sins? Check. Resurrection from the dead? Check. Ascension to heaven? Check. Ruling over all things? Check. Christ's work of saving us is done. He gets to sit down. He gets to sit at God's right hand. Not merely a physical location where he is stuck and can't move. But the position of power and glory. Christ the LORD is God's right hand man. Christ lives and reigns and rules.

He has put all his enemies under his feet. Let's hear that again. He has put all his enemies under his feet, as a foot stool for his feet. There's some points we might miss. One. Christ puts his enemies under his feet. That would be a more literal translation. Christ puts his enemies where he wants them. Christ's enemies have to go where Christ says and they have to stay when Christ says stay. Point number two. Christ doesn't always annihilate his enemies, he subjugates them. He doesn't annihilate. He subjugates. Christ doesn't always do away with his enemies. The devil still has some power. The sinful influence of a wicked world is spooking around, stronger than ever. There's still trouble and sadness and sickness and sorrow and tears and bad things happen to good people. Because Christ doesn't annihilate his enemies.

He subjugates them. Makes it kind of scary to be Christ's enemy doesn't it? Point three. God has always had enemies. Doesn't seem like long after God made everything perfect, there was a rebellion by the devil. The perfect God had enemies. The perfect Son of God, Jesus, had enemies. Pharisees who said his way to heaven was too easy. Just believe? No! You have to follow our laws. Sadducees who said, "There can't be resurrection from the dead! That just doesn't happen." Jesus didn't annihilate these enemies. He subjugated them. And you want to know the scariest part? I am the worst enemy of Jesus. Me, my sinful nature, and I. God says, "Speak," and I say, "Be quiet." God says, "Speak in a loving way to a brother who has sinned." But I say, "Be quiet. I shouldn't judge." God says, "Speak! Tell the whole world about my Son. Proclaim the good news to all creation." But I say, "Be quiet. It's too awkward. It's too embarrassing." God calls it love to speak up. We call it hate speech. God calls it hate to let a sinner go on his merry way to hell. We call it love to let people do what they want, be who they are. It's so scary, because I am naturally God's enemy. And he doesn't annihilate his enemies. He subjugates his enemies in hell, his horrible footstool.

Ancient kings used to take defeated armies and have them lay on the ground. Then the victorious king would place his foot on their necks. They would be his literal footstool. Jesus put the sinful world down, every day, as he lived a perfect life. Jesus never once said yes to the idea that everybody's doing it so it must be ok. Instead, he always listened to God perfectly. Why? So he could lift you up with his perfect life and give you his perfection. On one very special day, a very good Friday, Jesus beat the devil down. Yeah Jesus died. But the devil was defeated. Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose on that greatest Sunday, a day so great we still gather every single Sunday since and will continue to gather every Sunday until our ruling Jesus returns. And let me add one more to the usual triad. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. Jesus ascended. Even my sinful nature is at his feet. Even the natural enemy in my heart has been put down. Jesus has the ultimate victory, the complete and ongoing domination. And this same Jesus has lifted me up. His nail-pierced hands picked you up from your sins, cleaned you off in the waters of baptism. He gave his body and blood, just for you. Just for you. He lifted you up so you are so close to him, his real body and real blood are in your veins! He doesn't call you his enemy. He calls you his friend. Not a slave, but his son, his daughter.

The LORD has extended his mighty scepter to rule over his enemies. But he extends his powerful scepter to you, to call you his friend. Even from the midst of his enemies in this world, Jesus rules. Christ rules. The LORD rules.

We can see this contrast between verses two and three. In verse two, The LORD rules over his enemies by his power, extending his scepter, ruling in their midst. But in verse three, the LORD rules over his friends, by his grace. I know the phrase rule of grace sounds strange. But the LORD doesn't rule by laws, he rules by love, his undeserved love, his grace. The LORD doesn't force people into his army by a draft. He wins friends into his army who volunteer. His troops are willing on the day of battle. This is an all volunteer army. We aren't afraid to fight spiritual battles. We're already winners. We aren't afraid to be a spiritual army for Jesus. We are already on the winning side.

We are arrayed in holy majesty. This pictures the army as marching in fancy robes, the robes of priests or powerful people. The robe of holiness we wear in baptism. This is the majestic garment of a king. We are all kings in Christ's kingdom. Christ is the king of kings. He is the LORD of lords. In my sermon notes I abbreviated Lord of lords as LOL. Yeah, we can laugh at loud. Laugh out loud at the devil. He can't defeat Christ. We can laugh out loud to be on Christ's team, because we know Christ rules and Christ wins.

But what about all these words of womb and dawn and dew and youth? What's that? You know, it's tough to get too detailed. But don't all of these words, "womb and dawn and dew and youth," talk about something new? A baby from the womb. Something exciting? The dawn that ends the darkness. Something plentiful? The dew that comes from heaven and covers the ground as far as the eye can see. Something powerful? The vigor of youth. Christ's rule is all these things. Always new, very exciting, plentiful, powerful.

If a Philadelphia Eagles fan watched the most recent Super Bowl tonight, knowing their team had won, don't you think that would be a lot different than when they watched it live? The Patriots always seem to come back. They always have that one, last play. Every Super Bowl they have won was by just a few points. Waiting for that touchdown ruling had to be agonizing. "They are going to rule it not a catch." The fumble had to seem not real. Brady fumbled? Near the end of the game. Even up by eight points, with one last gasp, that football had to seem to hang in the air forever on that one, final tip. But then it fell to the ground. And the Eagles win. And the celebration starts. And the jubilation continues.

I know it seems like Christians are losing. The world has an insurmountable lead. My sinful nature doesn't let me see any signs of hope. But Jesus has been working. Every day, he put another nail in the devil's coffin with his perfect life. The nails in his hands were more nails in the devil's coffin. Jesus' three days in the tomb were the devil's last gasp. And he fell to the ground as harmlessly as that final pass. And the resurrection was the final dagger to the heart. But before the celebration could fully begin, Jesus had to Ascend. Christ's resurrection means nothing without the Ascension. Jesus didn't rise to die. He rose to live. He rose to rule. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. Jesus ascended! Amen.