

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer
Christ is keeping a list

—1 Corinthians 15:20-28

The FBI's "10 Most Wanted" list turns 70 this year. The Federal Bureau of Investigation started publishing the "10 Most Wanted" list in the spring of 1950. In the words of the FBI, the program is designed to publicize particularly dangerous fugitives who might not otherwise merit nationwide attention. The FBI works with various media outlets throughout the nation and the world to inform the public about these dangerous fugitives so the public can help catch them. The program has been quite successful. During the past 70 years, 524 fugitives have been put on the list (514 men and 10 women), and 490 of them have been caught or found. That's over 93%, and a third of those successes were helped directly by citizens. Some of the most wanted have spent years on the list; Osama bin Laden was on there for almost 12. Others, not so long: another man was on the list for only 2 hours before they found him. Short time or long, you do not want your name on that list. Chances are, you will be caught.

So what does that have to do with Christ the King Sunday? Well, a lot. What do you think Jesus Christ has been doing since he died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven so many years ago? Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and Christ reigns. Christ rules as King. "Well, sure," you say, "Christ rules over the church; he is the head, and the church is the body. He takes care of his church. He cleanses his church through baptism and feeds his church with his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. He provides his church with pastors and teachers at his right time and place. He is a very gracious King who rules with his gospel." And yes, all that is true. Christ is that kind of king.

That's not the only kind of king he is. Psalm 110, one of the main passages in the Bible that speaks of Christ's kingship, says it this way: "The LORD (meaning God the Father) says to my Lord (meaning Christ): 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" Speaking to Christ the psalm adds, "The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies." Christ does more than graciously rule over his friends; he also powerfully rules over his enemies. God has placed all things under the feet of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, including his enemies. Christ meant it when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28). Until the end of the world, even Christ's enemies, however much they rage against him, must in the end serve his purpose as he gather his church with his gospel and keeps it to the day of resurrection.

But he also has in view his enemies' ultimate demise. Christ is keeping a list of his enemies, and he is tracking them down. You don't want to be on that list. The FBI does well at 93%, catching or finding over 9 out of 10. Christ will do better. He will nullify and destroy 10 out of 10. So who are the enemies on Christ's most wanted list?

Governments are on that list. Kingships, imperial magistrates, dictatorships, parliaments, presidencies, legislatures, and every other ruling authority on earth that gathers against the Lord and his Christ. They conspire and plot in vain. They try to throw off the authority of Christ and try to become their own gods, the masters of their own destinies. All the Lord does is laugh. The Lord mocks them, terrifies them with his wrath and reminds them, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." No governing authority can push Christ off the hill and become king in his place. There is only one King of the hill, and it's Christ. Every king and every ruler who will not serve Christ, kiss him, and rejoice in him is on the most wanted list. And when Christ makes sure that justice is served, he won't be arresting and detaining. In the language of Revelation, he will be throwing his enemies into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, into everlasting hell.

False prophets and false teachers (Mt are on the most wanted list. Hypocritical liars who bend and distort God's truth often for their own clutch at power, gain, and glory. The wolves in sheep's clothing, who look like lambs but speak like snakes. They might put on spectacular displays, they might do impressive miracles. Many people may go after them. In some ways, the false prophets are worse than the governing authorities that oppose Christ. At least the governing authorities are outside the church. The false prophets come from within. Even to the last day, they will act like they belong in the church. On that day they will appeal to Christ himself, claiming a place in his heavenly kingdom and saying, "Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name perform many miracles?" But they will get a cold reply from Christ: "I never knew you." Christ will only acknowledge those who have confessed the truth: that sinners are saved only by God's grace only through faith in Christ. As for the false teachers, Christ the King will say, "Away from me, you evildoers!" He will throw these enemies too into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, into everlasting hell.

Surely, surely, Satan is on the most wanted list. And yes, he is definitely on the list. As well he should be. Christ himself used two words to describe the devil. A liar and a murderer. The two are connected. The devil lies so he can murder the bodies and souls of human beings. You know, anti-Christian governments and anti-Christian teachers, following their own sinful devices, may not always be aware that they are actually serving Satan and

doing his will. But Satan knows exactly what he is doing. He is an enemy of God, an enemy of God's chosen people, and an enemy of all that is right and good. He is responsible, through his allies in government and church, for the murders of countless human beings in body and soul. Surely he deserves whatever he has coming to him. He may be set free for a short time, but he knows his days are short. And he knows what his end will be. The fiery lake of burning sulfur, everlasting hell, to be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The question gets asked whether the FBI ranks the 10 most wanted. The short answer is, no, the FBI does not. However, in the 1930's, when cities like Chicago were going after gangsters, local authorities called their wanted criminals "public enemies." And the criminal they wanted to get most might be called "public enemy number one."

So after Christ has caught and condemned every last secular anti-Christian governmental authority, after he has caught and condemned every last anti-Christian force within the visible church on earth, after Christ has caught and condemned and consigned to hell the devil himself, what could possibly be left standing? On Christ's most wanted list, who could possibly be public enemy number one?

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.

It was a fateful day. The day that Adam brought death into the world. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. When God gives a law, and his law is broken by a sin, then the lawbreaker who sinned is subject to the penalty of death. God gave Adam a command the same day he created him: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Some days later Adam disobeyed. He ate fruit from the tree God commanded him not to eat from, and in that single act Adam brought death on himself. He brought death on his children. He brought death on his children's children. He brought death on all of us. All of us are going to die because we all, like the first man, have become sinners.

It was a fateful day. The day that Christ died for the sin of the world. God had said that Christ's heel would be crushed. And it was. The devil took quite a bite out of Christ, using both secular Roman government and Jewish religious authority to get him nailed to a cross. But the most severe blow to Christ was the law of God. God put Christ on a list of one and treated him like he was the only lawbreaker on earth. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Christ was caught and condemned for the sinners we are and for the sins we have done. Christ died the eternal death we deserved.

It was a fateful day. The day that Christ rose from the dead. You know why Christ got his heel crushed, right? Because he was using his heel to crush the devil's head. By dying and rising again from the dead, Christ destroyed the devil's power of death. The day Christ rose from the dead was huge for us. If Christ did not rise, our sins are not forgiven. If Christ did not rise in glory, then neither will we. But the apostle Paul, who saw with his own eyes the risen Christ, assures us Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Our sins, yours and mine, are forgiven. All of us who belong to Christ, even though we die, will be made alive.

It will be a fateful day. The day that Christ raises us from the dead. Or, if we are still alive on that day, the day that Christ changes our mortal bodies to be like his immortal body. It will be the fateful day for death. You see, up to the end death just keeps winning one victory after another. It asks for one person, and it gets him. It asks for another person, and it gets her. It asks for a child, and it gets the child. It asks for a senior citizen, and it gets the senior citizen. Like an out of control eater at a royal smorgasbord, death just keeps swallowing up one soul after another. It seems like death will never be caught, that its reign of terror will never end. But it will end. Death is the last name on Christ's most wanted list. And after Christ has raised you and me and all our fellow Christians from the dead, Christ will cross off the last name on his list. Death itself will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, where it will die an eternal death.

In our eternity, there will be no more most wanted list. No more enemies, no more death. Just life. With our great God and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, with God the Father, and with the Holy Spirit. We will live with God, who is all in all. So we end the church year with a final word of praise: "Christ, the Life of all the living, Christ, the Death of death, our foe...thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto thee" (CW 114). Amen.