

*21For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. 25For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. 28When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.*

Many of you could write the beginning of this sermon better than I for you lived the events that I have only heard of second hand. You lived the years 1941-1945 when a whole nation was at war. From most families someone had gone to the other side of the world to fight, or man ships, or to care for the wounded. Once Pearl Harbor was attacked the whole nation was plunged into the war effort. Rationing of sugar, and gasoline, and tires, saving tin cans and other commodities for recycling, even those here at home were contributing every day to the victory that would be won. The war was everyone's war, the victory would belong to all, not only to the heroes of the fighting but to those also who grew the food and worked in the factories. From the president to the school children, from soldiers to housewives, each contributed day by day to winning the war that had to be won.

It has been different here at home with the wars we have fought since then. Korea, Vietnam. Soldiers have still fought, families have still grieved, but the nation as a whole has not been much a part of the effort. These wars belonged to the generals and the military. Most of the nation just watched.

Our second lesson this morning speaks in language appropriate to war. "Then comes the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the

Father after destroying every rule and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Christ is reigning now. The one who was crucified has been raised from the dead. He rules over us, over all who believe in him. As he rules he is waging a battle against every rule and authority and power, or in other words against evil in every form. We in our day have no words for these cosmic ruler and authorities and powers of which Paul wrote except to speak of the devil, or Satan. But around us and attacking us we experience the artillery of these powers, disease, despair, hatred, hunger, sin, suffering, drugs, death. All of these are an assault on God, the attack on the goodness that God is and has created. Christ is God fighting back, fighting for what is his own, his people, his creation.

Sometimes you and I are the soldiers at the front in this battle. We visit a nursing home. As disability and disease are waging a terrible assault, as death creeps closer, and the most fearsome enemy of all despair threatens to crush another victim, we hold a hand. We listen. We bring love and laughter.

You and I are the soldiers who fight for teenage hearts. Against powers that bombard our children with the meaninglessness of life, we teach of a Lord who has a plan for their lives. We are willing to say "no" to our children, to limit them because what they do does matter. What they do is important to us and important to our God. We go the second mile for children; we never give up on them, considering them hopeless, because in their hearts God is fighting for his kingdom. Here in this place you are all soldiers in the battle for teenagers' hearts. Stopping them in the hallway, talking with them, listening to them, in such simple actions as these Christ makes his assault on his enemies.

You are soldiers. There is not one of us here who is safe from the powers arrayed against our God. Disease can bring despair, grief can drown out hope, anger can lead to hatred. We are each of us soldiers of

Christ, Christ himself fighting to hang onto everyone who is under attack - making the special effort to remember the sick - forgiving those who sin against us - praying for every needy one - standing alongside of those who suffer in homes broken by divorce or death. Each of us are commissioned by Christ to fight this battle, even as we are the ones in need of others fighting for us.

But on other fronts where hunger and poverty are weapons of God's enemies, we are no longer the soldiers, but those who stay at home, sacrificing for the war effort. We give up what we could have for ourselves so that others may eat a little. For God has created everyone who is now hungry. He has given them life that they might know him and his love for them. But the powers and authorities opposed to God are doing everything they can to claim hold of these lives. Every person fed is a victory won for Christ, every child clothed, every disease defeated, a victory for our God.

I hope for each of us that we will believe and live that God's battle against all God's enemies is our battle also. Far too often in the church, the battle against evil has been regarded as the Vietnam War was regarded by America - not my war - not calling forth my sacrifice.

In the gospel reading this day we heard how precious the hungry and the naked and the sick and the imprisoned are to our Lord. As you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.

Sometimes people ask questions about when we have done enough - our fair share. In war such questions have no meaning. Defeating the enemy is all that matters.

How many of the hungry must we feed? How many teenagers must we encourage? How many must we visit in the nursing homes?

As long as we wait for our Lord to come again, all of our life and all of our being is devoted to this war. While Christ is putting all enemies under his feet, we are his soldiers. Until the last enemy, death is destroyed we sacrifice together in this battle. The world lost in Adam, will have been won in Christ. And God will be everything to everyone.

