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Second Sunday in Lent

***17*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. *18*For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. *19*Their end is destruction; their God is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. *20*But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. *21*He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. *4:1*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.**

(Philippians 3:17 – 4:1; NRSV)

“Through Christ, Your Citizenship Is in Heaven”

Which worldwide citizenship is the most wanted? I mean, which passport holder can travel around the world with minimal traveling restrictions? *The Polish passport is number 10 in the world and guarantees free travel to 182 countries around the world. *The United States passport currently is number 7 and ensures free travel to 185 countries worldwide. *Then, you can travel to 192 countries with a passport number 1 in the world that belongs to Japan.

Interestingly, the Bible speaks about the value of citizenship, the citizenship of the Heavenly Kingdom. You can gain your earthly citizenship through your birth or go through the process of naturalization designed for others, with many requirements. This is not an easy process. The Bible tells us about the citizenship of Heaven. This kind of citizenship can be gained under a differently designed process, compared to many countries’ earthly citizenship. So, when we think of salvation, we start a strategy to achieve the citizenship of the Heavenly Kingdom. ***“Through Christ, Your Citizenship Is in Heaven.”** Don’t you think that this is an exciting subject toward our sureness of salvation? I believe there is excitement, a joyful attitude, and a constant readiness to continue a mission to which we are called. Through Christ, you are destined to be in Heaven. In your final days, you will be recognized as a citizen of Heaven. Oh yes, because your name has to be recorded in the Book of Life.

The Book of Revelation, chapter 20, tells us about an important part of our religious life as believers..., or non-believers. Even the dead must appear before God, and your identity will be revealed to you by God, who will open the Book of Life to see if your

name is there, or not. So, if your name was not found in the Book of Life, woe to you; you will be thrown into the lake of fire. But, let me tell you this. You all are called to be registered – recorded in the Book of Life. It means you have already taken action to gain the citizenship of Heaven. *How does it work? The Bible tells us in the letter to the *Romans 10:9* ^{NRSV}, **“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”** It is Christ who granted you the most powerful citizenship! It means you have a passport for the most prestigious travel, a passport of the most powerful government. The passport seal’s value is above all earthly travels, even above the 192 countries. Your identity is positioning you in the most privileged place and position, even above the dead of the royal family members. ***“Through Christ, Your Citizenship Is in Heaven.”** Since you gained this most privileged title, you must remember that you have responsibilities before entering the Heavenly Kingdom.

*In *2 Corinthians 5:17*; ^{NRSV}, we recognize how we are changed. **“¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”** This new characteristic is according to your citizenship in Heaven.

This is not the end. We are appointed to a special task we learn about when we continue reading from **2 Corinthians 5:20*; ^{NRSV}. **“²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”** When God opens the Book of Life in Heaven, do not worry about whether you had been representing Christ and His Kingdom as the earthly ambassadors do, since you **“confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord.”** An ambassador is nominated and sent to a host country to represent the governing body and the entire beauty of his country. You are ambassadors from Heaven, therefore you have to be qualified for this position, and your qualification is through Christ.

First, a firm foundation of faith is critical to you, ambassador. Faith characterizes, to others, whom you represent. Ambassadors are obligated to faithfully and loyally display through your service the joy, charity, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, honesty, and trust, making desirable the place they came from. Now I am telling you the Kingdom of Heaven is the most desirable place to live. ***“Through Christ, Your Citizenship Is in Heaven.”** Remember whom you represent.

Secondly, ambassadors must always be conscious of the fact that they are a minority in their host country and should be able to relate to many different types of people (*as God's people are in the world*). *Don't you remember that Jesus told you, **"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."** (*Matthew 10:16; NRSV*).

Thirdly, good ambassadors are entirely grounded in ethical and moral judgment. They are faithful disciples. They emptied themselves and were fulfilled with the power of the Holy Spirit because they are constantly facing situations that do not have black-and-white answers. *They are representing the most wanted citizenship and place to live; therefore, they must remain in constant fellowship and an unbreakable relationship with Jesus who represents them – in Heaven; because **"Through Him, Your Citizenship Is in Heaven."**

Now, I see us as the ones Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about, that he/we must **"be diligent to present yourself/ourselves as approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"** (*2 Timothy 2:15; NRSV*). We, ambassadors are ruling, leading, and judging the nations, and we have to be prepared for this at any time.

*The final sign recognizing all ambassadors, has one thing in common: **ambassadors believe in the mission they were sent to do.** They know the goals and values of the communities and businesses and local churches. They share the values of Heaven with others. We are called to be ambassadors in this world but not to conform to this world. We proudly represent and proclaim Jesus Christ within our communities, businesses, and through the embassy as a local church, as well as we possibly can. Our identity and the eternal passports are granted and sealed by Jesus' blood; never forget it! God has entrusted us to be ambassadors. Therefore, He recorded our names in the Book of Life. When we walk, we walk with Jesus. When we die, we die for a place where we can go. Through Christ, we have the ability and honor to represent the Heavenly Kingdom. *The Apostle Paul wrote: **"¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ,"** let us imitate to be worthy of our citizenship of Heaven.

Amen.