

2nd Sunday in Lent – Year C

February 28, 2010

Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Pastor Paul Horn

Citizens of Heaven: Walk this Way!

I. Waiting eagerly for the Savior

II. Standing firm in the Lord

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

She was branded a traitor in Japan when she changed her nationality in February last year in order to pursue her dream of Olympic gold. Japan is not known for producing world-class pairs skaters. She has lived and trained in Russia since 2003 for her moment in Vancouver, British Columbia. But Japanese-born Yuko Kavaguti had to apologize Monday for losing the Olympic figure skating pairs gold for her adopted country, Russia.

Not only are the Russians upset that they've failed to continue their streak of putting skaters on the podium since 1960, but the Japanese people are upset. One of their own has forsaken her heritage. Some Olympic athletes actually have dual citizenship. T.J. Mulock, for example, lives and plays hockey in Canada, but retains his birthright in Germany. So for these 2010 Olympic Games his name was on the German hockey roster.

Our lesson is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. Citizenship was a big deal to the

people of Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, which meant that the citizens of that city were citizens of the city of Rome itself. They prided themselves on that fact. To obtain citizenship as a Roman, it either had to be purchased for a very high price, or you were born into it.

In a sense, as Christians, we hold dual citizenship. We live in this world, but as Jesus says, we live as though not a part of it. Our **true citizenship is in heaven.** (vs20) To be a member of heaven is not something that we purchased nor were we born into it naturally. But by being born of water and the Spirit through baptism, we have been made God's children, members of his family, made holy by the blood of Christ Jesus. Since we are residents of place of eternal glories, there is a certain way that we will live. In the original Greek language Paul says, "**Join in being my fellow imitators, brothers, take note of those who are walking in this way as you have us for an example.**" Paul says, "Since you are citizens of heaven, walk this way..."

It is a well accepted fact of life that the role models and lifestyles we choose to follow greatly influence our thoughts, attitudes and goals for living. Instead of looking to the sinful world for examples on how to live, the apostle urged the Philippians, his "brothers," to look to fellow citizens of the same country of heaven for good patterns of good Christian living. Paul wasn't trying to be proud or boost himself up. Paul lived the way he lived because God, by his Word and Sacraments, shaped Paul into the Christian man he was. Paul followed the example of Christ. He encouraged the Philippians to take notes on how he and other Christians lived.

Because, as he continues in vs18, "**Many are living as enemies of the cross of Christ.**" Someone might raise the question, "Are there really enemies of the cross of Christ, folks who oppose the message that Christ was crucified for sinners so that they might be saved through him?" Paul says, "There are many," then in his time and now in 2010. He describes these people, vs19, **Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.**"

These are people who think only of earthly things. They take pride in words and actions of which they really ought to be embarrassed. They make their stomach their god, in other words, they live and pursue lifestyles of licentiousness, self-gratification and self-indulgence without any restraints. They're so filled with themselves that they are all that matter in life. And while they live on this earth they interfere with the work of spreading the good news of Christ and His cross. They often make life difficult for those who try to glory in Christ's cross. But in the end, Paul says, "**Their destiny is destruction.**" They will face eternal annihilation, not the good life they thought they had.

Since we live in this world, this is a pattern that surrounds us. It's hard to ignore it. Paul shares

this information and issues a sharp warning because all too often, we can get sucked into thinking that way, and end up living those lifestyles, walking the ways of the sinful world with our minds always on earthly things. The danger in following the example of the world can have a fatal consequence; walking the highway to hell and being permanent citizens in the lake of fire.

How do we escape the influence of this sinful world that surrounds us? How do we ignore this pattern? **“Follow our example, walk this way, in the pattern we set for you.”** Mimic the attitude that Paul provides for us. Remember that although you live in this world, you live in it as aliens, as foreigners. Although your home’s postal code may be 40121 or 40160, your real home is in heaven. Although you may check *US citizen* when you register, your true citizenship is in God’s holy kingdom, the Holy Christian Church, with the communion of saints. As citizens of God’s heaven, we walk this way, as Paul says, **“We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

There are a few events in this world that we look forward to with great anticipation; the birth of a child, the baptism of that child; a spouse or a son or daughter returning from deployment, a successful surgery, our new church finally completed. But out of all those events, the one event that we look forward to with the greatest anticipation is the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus. We eagerly wait for our Savior because when he comes on clouds with his angels, he will give us rest from our labors, he will bring new life and change, Paul says in vs21, **“[He] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”**

The human mind, ever curious, asks, “What will our new bodies look like? Will I look like a young child or a mature adult?” Does it matter? What is the point the Holy Spirit makes with the doctrine of the resurrected body? Look at your bodies. Your sinful body is subject to decay, susceptible to sickness, disease and death, ravaged by sin. You feel the effects of sin everyday in wasting bones and aching muscles. When Christ comes, your bodies will be those things no more. When Christ comes, your body will either be dust in the grave or your body will still be living and active. In either case, Jesus will change your bodies. He will transform it so that it will be like his resurrection body. For now, we bear the likeness of man, the image of Adam, sin and death; when Christ comes, the image of God, holiness, sinlessness, and life, will be restored to us through Christ Jesus.

Paul explains how this is possible, **“Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform your lowly bodies...”** An overused sports announcers’ cliché is, “They’re in control of their own destiny now.” Thank God that we are not in charge of our eternal destiny. Thank God that Jesus Christ has all power over our eternal destiny. He is

omnipotent over all things, almighty over even our sin. Jesus exerted his almighty power by destroying sin, your sins, in his body. For all the times you and I have walked in the ways of this world, for selfishness, stubborn pride, and self-gratification, he bore those sins in his body, as if they were his sins, and put away your sins forever on the cross. **“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”** (Ps 103:12) Only Jesus, the God-Man has the power to do that.

Jesus is omnipotent over not only your sins, but the ravaging affects of sin. When he stepped out of the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, he stepped on the neck of death, not by accident, but on purpose. When he rose from his grave he fulfilled what King David wrote, **“You will not let your holy one see decay.”** (Ps 16:10) Because Christ Jesus rose bodily from grave, releasing himself from death’s grip, he has released you from your sins and your grave and death, they have no power over you, for Christ has all power over them!

There is nothing this world offers that compares with this. I’ve this song before as an example and I’m going to use it again.... country singer Kenny Chesney sings, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, but not everybody wants to go right now.” Why not? What does this world have to offer that’s so great, that’s worth sticking around for? All of the things of this earth that we cling to will all be gone. When we feed the god of our stomach, it only leaves us with a spiritual gut ache. Even if we think about our loved ones and say, “But when I die, they’ll miss me!” How selfish! Or if we say, “I’ll miss them if they die.” If we truly love them, we will want them to stay focused on their home of heaven, too. Stop thinking about earthly things. Instead, walk this way! Not as citizens of this world, but as citizens of heaven, eagerly waiting for Christ to come again and transform these lowly bodies so they can party for eternity, where you will not grow tired, where you will never be weak, and God will wipe every tear from your eye.

This is the life you have since you are a citizen of heaven. Notice I did not say, “This is the life you will have since you will be citizens of heaven.” Paul said, **“Our citizenship is in heaven.”** Right now! It’s yours! God guarantees it. Stand firm in that promise. **“Stand firm in the Lord.”** (vs1) When you struggle with the immensity of our building project, when a spouse or child is deployed, when your marriage relationship is rocky, when loved ones die or are near death, when the doctor puts the anesthesia into your IV, when you struggle with forgiving others when they wrong you, when you feel that you are being sucked in by the influence of this sinful world, stand firm in God’s promise. Your citizenship **is** in heaven. You will walk that way. You will live your life that way... eagerly waiting for the Savior, and standing firm in the Lord. Amen.

