

# *Citizenship*

*Second Sunday in Lent*

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## **Sunday, March 13, 2022**

Where do I belong? Some of you will know of my interest in family history and will be aware that when tracing the "Lang" line as far back as eight generations, how each has moved. Someone kindly suggested that it had something to do with avoiding the debt collectors. But in my family history, the sense of belonging is difficult. It is quite a contrast to many who live in this District who have long standing connections to this region.

It is interesting to reflect on the process of changing location. First you begin with the wow - and everything looks good, then you look back and you feel home sick and the things of where you come from seem so much better than where you are now. Eventually you adjust and in time you will come to the realisation that you belong in the new place. I remember my father remarking one day, that he had now lived in Victoria longer than he had lived in his birthplace of South Australia. Similarly in Ghana I remember glancing down at my arm and discovering that it was white (I had become so at home there, that it didn't occur to me that I was noticeably different.) I am not a native Tasmanian, but I know that there is my citizenship, for it is when Tassie does well in sport then I am happy. Perhaps the litmus test of our loyalties is encapsulated in the question: "who is it that we want to win?" when our former homeland plays our adopted homeland.

Paul's discussion in Philippians that formed our second reading today is about the choice of two citizenships. You are either in one camp or the other. You are either an enemy of the cross of Christ or a citizen of heaven, there is no middle path. Paul sees the divide between those who are heading for heaven (and life eternal) and those destined for destruction. Those whose:

end is destruction;  
god is the belly;  
glory is in their shame  
minds are set on earthly things

In contrast, our citizenship is in heaven

Paul is not talking in terms of superiority but rather an understanding of the distinction between those who follow Christ and those who follow the other way. Paul points to himself as a guide or an example but not so much as a pride, but rather the concern that these brothers and sisters would have a way to follow on the path to heaven. It is not as much that Paul was saying look at me, how good I am - more he was saying - This is what we should be - examples pointing to Christ. I don't know about you, but this is an awesome thought to me. It is our calling and our ministry in our community to be signposts to Jesus.

Paul gives an interesting illustration of our work here on earth. We are to live as citizens of heaven and it was Paul's passion to the point of tears, that we would populate heaven by our example. Paul did not despise those outside the kingdom, but

rather wept for them. The question, have "We wept for the lost?" is fundamental in all that we do. We cannot see ourselves as some form of exclusive club, seeking to recruit members only of our ilk.

The challenge of being an obedient church is to open wide our doors to all comers, not only welcoming them but also allowing them to become part of the family. In doing so, we will take the risk that they will change us by their presence, as well as us changing them. Paul says that living out Gospel before them will help lead them on the path to salvation, and the challenge of a Christian life well led is irresistible.

Paul's method of evangelism is not based on any programme or package or required teaching but calls on me and you to be the example that draws others into heavenly citizenship. And it is this great passion to do draw others in that is the greatest evidence that we have understood the calling.

So here on Yorkes, what does this mean? How should we be church? Perhaps I should pre-empt these remarks with the comment that we are doing many things right already, so this is a checklist as much as a list of proposed changes. These are the things that we should be mindful of in times ahead and seek to ensure they are part of all we do.

We should have a passion for the outsider. This is not only those in our own social circle, but all people who do not know Jesus. If the most important thing is to know Jesus and to make him known, we must look beyond our boundaries and draw in others. And this presupposes:

We should be prepared to take risks. The stranger and outsider will bring new dynamics into the fold. Think of the dramatic change in a family when a son or daughter marries. There is someone new within, and the need to accommodate them is part of the welcoming and incorporating process. This means that we cannot be comfortable with the way things are, for there should be a natural process of change as we incorporate new members. (And the new members will change too, as we grow together.)

This implies an openness to a growing and dynamic faith, with the excitement of a faith journey which takes us to new places. One of the greatest impressions of services in Ghana was that we never knew what would happen from week to week. It is about being prepared for something new to happen. In as much as we have laid a foundation of uniformity of worship, now we can be open to the possibility of new things to happen within this framework

Finally, we must be confident in our citizenship. It has in it the expectation of a greater place and a closer experience of Jesus. This is what will give us the ability to stand firm as Paul describes. The events of Easter, indeed the whole Christian faith need a reality that gives us the assurance that these are a basis for life. Others who see this will be challenged and with the grace of God, pursue this for their own salvation. We must be visible Christians that we might draw others. I am not speaking about the parading of piety but the presence of a faith based assurance that gives others the confidence to trust in the same way we do.

So let us take up from Paul the challenge to live as citizens of heaven and like him to weep for those who are on the outside.

**AMEN**