

True Citizenship Philippians 3:17-20

Let me be your example here, my brothers: let my example be the standard by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you. For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction—their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the saviour who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I love the saying from Mark Twain – He said you could categorize people into three groups: commonplace, remarkable, and lunatics. I know you are already putting people into the different categories – but you can do that this afternoon.

The Apostle Paul was a little more narrow in his scope – when he said there are only two kinds of people – “citizens of the world” and “citizens of heaven”.

And Paul says that the difference is that the citizens of the world – they tear things down even if it leads to their own destruction. Their god is their own appetite – they let their wants and wishes drive them

without concern. Their pride is out of control – it is all about them. And today and this world is the whole of their focus.

But Paul says that is NOT supposed to be us. He says, “**our citizenship is in heaven.** And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.”

It is a life of discipline and devotion. It is a life of faith and faithfulness. It is a life of conscience and commitment. We are still in this world even while the Kingdom of Heaven is in our hearts. Oh yes, we still have feet of clay, and we may stumble and sometimes fall. But we know that we are part of something bigger and we are constantly working to bring the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

I think about that on this weekend where we celebrate our Nation’s Independence Day. One of the things that is wonderful to on this weekend is to read through the Declaration of Independence – to

remember the ideals and the values that lay at the foundation of our Country.

A few years ago, my youngest daughter, Bentley, and I travelled to Philadelphia to experience a marvelous event. On a Friday evening in the fall, we joined with a small group who ate supper at City Tavern and then walked over to Independence Hall. Once we were there the group had a private tour of the chamber of Independence Hall. And then we moved to the entrance way and actors portraying Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson came down the stairs debating Dr. Frankin's edits to Jefferson's work. After they batted back and forth their rationales and reasons – the actor portraying Jefferson read to us the Declaration of Independence.

The words of the Preamble still hold amazing power:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

I love the Fourth of July—everything about it.

I'm grateful for my country, for those times when I think we get things really right, but also, or maybe I'm grateful for my country particularly when I don't agree with something, because we have the freedom to disagree.

William Sloane Coffin once said, "There are three kinds of patriots. Two are bad and one is good. The bad ones are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. But, the good ones, the good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their country, a reflection of God's lover's quarrel with the world." **Loving it, but always wanting it to be the best it can be.**

I think we can do this when we remember that the Apostle Paul wants us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God – to live with the Kingdom of Heaven in us – the rule and reign of God in us – then we can love our country with the vision and compassion of Christ – we can love it with a transcendent ethic that allows us to help fulfill that

“Patriot’s Dream” we sing about – that “sees beyond the years, her alabaster cities gleam undimmed by human tears.”

An unknown monk around 1100 AD said, “When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn’t change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn’t change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.”

As we live as citizens of the Kingdom and as we have the rule and reign of God in our lives – we can change our families, our city, our state, our country, and even our world. As we live out the message of Christ and show others the love of Christ we see ourselves changed and our world. As we live with the vision and compassion of Christ, and the

spirit to treat everyone, even those we disagree with, in a way that reflects the love of Christ we help our nation to truly be a blessing.

America, America, may God thy gold refine. Til all success is nobleness and every gain divine.

This weekend, as you celebrate Independence Day, remember Paul tells us that as people of faith, we are called to live as citizen's of the Kingdom of God – and when we do we can change our lives and we can change our country.

So, in prayer, ask **how you can all the rule and reign of God in your life?** – living as a citizen of the Kingdom – and **how can you help bring the kingdom into our world even now?**