

Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18
Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

Last Sunday our preacher was Veeda Gill, executive director of the Presbyterian Education Board. She grew up in Pakistan and she was engaged to her husband at three months of age. Her four sons live in Philadelphia. She and her four sons are now American citizens. I also found out that she kept her Pakistani citizenship, and thus has dual citizenship status. That surprised me for I thought the United States did not allow dual citizenship. So, of course I googled it. When people take an oath to become citizens, that oath says, in part. "I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen." In 1967 the Supreme Court ruled that that was a violation of the Constitution. There are problems with dual citizenship, and we will get to that in a moment. There has not been much attention given to whether we should continue dual citizenship, because most of our energy and resources are being spent on the issue of undocumented immigrants, and whether there should be a path to citizenship for these undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians, declared that their "citizenship is in heaven." These Philippians had a dual citizenship. The Philippians were proud to be Roman citizens. In that day the Roman citizens were the privileged of that part of the world. The Roman empire was a powerful and wealthy empire. However, Paul told them there was a better citizenship to be had. A citizenship in heaven, a citizenship in the kingdom of God.

We too have a dual citizenship. Author Lionel Basney wrote, "I drove past the fine, vital, Roman Catholic church in the next town, and there were two signs out in front. One was the church marquee; the other was a cardboard sign on a short wooden stick, indicating with an arrow that the parish house was being used as a polling place. The marquee read: "Our citizenship is in heaven." The cardboard sign read: "Vote here."

Dual citizenship is problematic for it creates divided loyalties. Divided loyalties are a perceived problem for those who live in our nation, even when these persons do not possess citizenship in their ancestral countries. Witness the internment of 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. We questioned their loyalty and in the name of safety and defense, we moved them to camps surrounded with barbed wires and under guard. These detainees were housed in "tar paper-covered barracks of simple frame construction without plumbing or cooking facilities of any kind." Sixty-two percent of the detainees were American citizens. When a United States citizen is also a citizen of another country, the accusation of divided loyalty is even easier to make. Today, we hear a lot of hate speech and actions against Muslims in our nation. Do they have a divided loyalty? Are they loyal to the United States?

Paul does not say that we are to renounce our citizenship wherever we live. Rather, as Christians, ours is a dual citizenship, citizens of the United States, and citizens of the kingdom of God. Our ultimate loyalty is to God; our ultimate allegiance is to God. Citizenship in heaven demands that we live differently. As one Baptist preacher wrote we are called to be countercultural. Our call is to cruciform living., The cross is central to imitating Christ. This lifestyle is the antithesis to a materialistic approach of

living. “Sadly, for many North Americans, the paradigm is to worship at the altar of having stuffed lives, filled to the brim. Gluttony is not too strong a word to describe such a life. Having a voracious appetite for self-fulfillment apart from the cross is a denial of the one who emptied himself of this kind of life in order to embrace the cross.”

As Christians, our paradigm of citizenship in heaven is countercultural. In a world of insatiable hunger for accumulation, Christ says that we are to sell all we have and give to the poor; in a world where the solution to violence is more violence, Christ tells us to love the enemy, even to turn the other cheek; in a dog-eat-dog world where many seek to climb the career ladder, to be the greatest; Christ says that the least will be the greatest, that greatness comes not from being served but serving. That is cruciform living. That is countercultural. That is living as citizens of the kingdom of God.

That does not mean it will be easy or that those who are not citizens of the kingdom of God can understand. The Japanese and Japanese Americans know how difficult it was to live in our nation during World War II. My home church was a German speaking church until after World War II. During both World War I and II, the church at times had to have some of their own members protecting the church, for fear of hatred toward and violence against Germans. It isn't easy, but it is life-giving.

A great Russian poet—I'm not about to pronounce his name, says that "crosslessness" is the real problem. "Not a cross--it's crosslessness we carry ..." The poet is right. Our problem is not so much the fact of the cross, as our fear of the cross. We try so hard to be safe that we make ourselves dangerous. We try so hard to have things go just right that we make them go wrong. Paul invites us to go beyond crosslessness to the cross, and then beyond the cross to citizenship in heaven

We suffer more by trying to avoid suffering. Denial is a dirty scheme to get us out of life, away from Jesus and into a fictional safety. It is dangerous. It is lethally dangerous--because who then takes up the touch of Mother Teresa, who brings the widow a cup of coffee? Instead of being "touched" by life, we are untouched. Not being touched, or not touching, hurts.

The cross doesn't condemn us so much as glide along with us, no matter how clumsily we move. The cross is actually permission to do what we don't know how to do. When we live by the cross, we don't have to be so afraid of making mistakes: Mistakes are actually part of the gateway to heaven. Cruciform living is a way we can face our anxieties. Cruciform living may seem so unintuitive. Yet, it is a way we can deal with suffering. It is the way to live life at its fullest.

Paradoxically, we never completely and fully attain the cruciform pattern in this life. We must always "press on." Lent reminds us of this. The pattern of cruciform living has been given to us by Christ, yet it cannot be fully duplicated in our lives. We can only strive toward it with determination, thankful for all the living examples of the pattern living around us in a community of faith. In this season of Lent, we travel the wilderness with Christ and pick up the cross on which he will be crucified. Yet, at Easter we celebrate that death is not the final word, but that Christ has overcome the power of death. He is our savior for whenever we fail in being citizens of the kingdom of God.

Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.