

11.7.2021 Trinity 23 (Philippians 3:17-21)

A famous rabbi lived very simply, inhabiting a small hut with only a cot, desk, chair, and a lamp for furnishings. An American tourist came to visit the rabbi and commented on his simple, sparse lifestyle. The rabbi said to the tourist, "I don't see many possessions with you today." The tourist replied, "But I'm only passing through." To which the rabbi said, "So am I."

In the Epistle we read this morning, St. Paul makes a clear distinction between people "*who mind earthly things*" (Philippians 3:19), those who have settled in and made this world their home, and people who, by the grace of God, are only passing through, because their "*citizenship is in heaven*" (Philippians 3:20). St. Paul describes the first type of person this way, he writes, "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame...*" (Philippians 3:18-19).

This is the description St. Paul offers for people we might call "citizens of the world," and like Jesus, who beheld the great city of Jerusalem and wept for those who rejected and crucified Him (Luke 19:41), Paul weeps for these *enemies of the cross of Christ*. His heart breaks for those he describes as worshippers of their belly, those who live only to indulge themselves. Paul sheds tears of compassion for those *whose glory is in their shame*, or in other words, those who don't feel shame, sadness, or regret over wrong behavior, but instead flaunt that kind of behavior in an attempt to normalize, or even glorify their actions.

St. Paul wept for these citizens of the world, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and before we go any further this morning we should ask ourselves the question, when we think of "*enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction,*" do we react in the same way? Do we weep for them? Do we pray for them as our Lord prayed from the Cross for those who crucified Him, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). When I consider our Lord's tears of compassion, and the way St. Paul wept as well for those he described as enemies of the Cross, I can't help but think such tears are one indication that God is actively working in us, giving us a new heart and a new

spirit (Ezekiel 36:26), a spirit that moves as He moves, and a heart that loves as He loves.

There are people who have “*conformed*” to this world (Romans 12:2), who have made it their home, and we must battle the temptation to settle in as they have, “*for our citizenship is in heaven.*” This is an important truth we must accept completely, the truth that we are not *going* to belong to heaven, we *belong* to heaven. In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis expressed that thought with these words, he wrote, “Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world... I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country... I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.”

We were made for another world, and therefore we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” (1 Peter 2:11) in this land, people who are merely passing through as we journey toward our true country - heaven. Like an American tourist, or a rabbi with almost no furnishings, or better yet our Lord, who had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20) and died with only one possession, a seamless robe for which the Roman soldiers cast lots as they crucified Him (John 19:23-24), like those examples, we should feel as attached to, and settled in, this world as we would if we were an American tourist currently staying in a motel room in Calcutta (Kolkata). As fascinating as it would be to visit such an exotic land, and to spend time enjoying all of the amazing things it would offer to us, we would never call it home. We wouldn't start moving in our furniture, or hang pictures on the walls.

We are meant to thoroughly enjoy every good gift this world has to offer, but as citizens of heaven we don't hold on to this world, or these gifts, too tightly. We can't in good conscience put down deep roots that tether us to this finite world, because when we examine our heart and soul, we find exactly what Lewis described: “a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy.” Our souls, as the psalmist declares, thirst for God, for the living God (Psalm 42:2). Our desire is the infinite, the eternal. Our desire is to see clearly

all that is currently veiled from our sight.

In his great chapter on love, St. Paul wrote, *“For now (in this world) we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known”* (1 Corinthians 13:12). The greatest desire of our heart, a desire this world cannot satisfy, is to continually see God face to face, to spend eternity with our hearts, souls, and minds overflowing with the knowledge of His love. Jonathan Edwards once wrote that “God is the highest good... and the enjoyment of Him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.” He said, “To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean.”

God is the ocean, and even the greatest gift this world has to offer is but a drop. Citizens of heaven understand that truth. Citizens of heaven give thanks and thoroughly enjoy every good gift this world has to offer, and yet we recognize that even on our best day these good gifts, instead of satisfying every desire, actually work to arouse in us an even greater desire, a desire to know and be known by the Giver. Whatever your best day looks like here in this world, that day, that incredible blessing that came from Him is but a drop. Your best day here is but a drop, God is the ocean. Let that truth, let the knowledge of all that awaits us in our true country, awaken your soul to the reality that God is the only One able to satisfy the greatest desire of your heart, and as a citizen of heaven, find peace and rest in the knowledge that it is God’s will, through our Savior Christ, to bring you to heaven, where you will no longer be a stranger and a pilgrim in a foreign land, but a child of God in your heavenly home, a child whose soul will find infinite, joyful satisfaction in His holy presence forever.