

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: STAR TREK

Sermon: Beam Me Up, Scotty!

Phil 3:12-21

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Following Paul's Example

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you 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 set 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

Sermon

We were flying back from Tokyo, Japan, and in the middle of that flight, a person in our party came down with kidney stones - to the point of needing medical attention. We landed in Vancouver, Canada and were escorted off of the plane. At a checkpoint, we were asked to surrender our passports to the authorities - and off we went to the hospital. That night, all good, we made arrangements for our flight back into the U.S. and were able to secure an 8 a.m. flight out the next day. We could pick up our passports at the same checkpoint we gave them up. We showed up early for our flight, and found out that the checkpoint didn't open until 9 a.m. No exceptions. We missed that flight, among others, as we fought to get back our documentation. One security agent, when we asked to get back our passports, asked, "What passports? Who turns over their passports?" "You did! Yesterday!" We began devising plans on how to sneak back into the U.S. - others do it, there's got to be a way. Luckily, we eventually made it out of Canada with our passports, but for too long, we were citizens without a country - apparently illegal travelers in British Columbia. It's a little unnerving not knowing to whom you belong.

If we could have, we would have just teleported ourselves across the border. Just beam us home. Apparently I've watched too much Star Trek. We're in the middle of a Star Trek series, and this week, I'm using that famous phrase, Beam Me Up, Scotty. If you know the show at all, you've heard the phrase, Beam Me Up, Scotty. Kind of. Scotty is in Engineering, and somehow that puts him in charge of the Transporter Beams, moving people from the ship down to the planet and visa versa. If Kirk or Spock or whoever was in trouble, they could just easily beam them out and back to safety. Beam me Up, Scotty. Here's your bit of trivia for the day: Never, in any episode of Star Trek, did anybody ever say, Beam Me Up, Scotty. Never was said. Variations, for sure, but never really said. It made its way on t-shirts, bumper stickers, even was the title to Montgomery Scott's autobiography. But the idea, we belong somewhere else, teleport us out of here is where I want to go with this sermon today. Where do we belong?

Citizenship is a big deal in our country right now. Illegal immigration, DACA, There is talk about how to keep non-citizens out, how to keep them from entering our country. There was talk about which presidential candidate or candidates may or may not be “natural born citizens” and thus eligible to run, and about what that term “natural born citizen” actually means. Our attention is drawn to our rights as citizens, guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. And we think of our duties as citizens, to be well-informed when we consider candidates and cast our votes. So citizenship is at the forefront of the thinking of many people right now.

Well, today I’m here to tell you that you should be thinking about your citizenship, and rightly so. Our duty as citizens, our civic involvement, is important. But there’s a citizenship you have that is even more important, and by a factor of about a bazillion. And that is the citizenship St. Paul talks about today when he says, “Our Citizenship Is in Heaven.” Yes, our citizenship is in heaven. And this morning we’ll explore what that means—and what it doesn’t mean. We’ll use the Epistle to the people of Philippi for our text this morning.

Philippeans Chapter 3. Interesting that Paul would use this term “citizenship” when writing to the Philippians. Because citizenship was indeed a very big deal in Philippi. That city, while located in Macedonia (North part of Greece), had become a Roman colony. So there were a large number of Roman citizens living in Philippi, especially retired military. And Roman citizenship carried with it certain privileges, wherever you happened to live in the Empire.

As Paul himself well knew. You might remember an old Sunday School lesson about Paul and Philippi: When Paul and Silas first arrived in Philippi on their missionary journey, they were thrown in Prison. Shackled up. “Two for Paul and Silas” That night there was an earthquake, Paul and Silas were set free, and they even converted the Philippian jailer and his family. But then the next day, Paul had a complaint to raise with the city officials: “Did you guys know that I am a Roman citizen? You’re not to treat a Roman citizen like I was treated!” The officials there in Philippi were apologetic and freaking out just a little. You see, Roman citizenship had its privileges.

So Paul’s use of the term “citizenship” here in his epistle to the church in Philippi has with it all that background. But Paul sort of turns the term around. It’s not Roman citizenship that is so important, or any other earthly citizenship. No, what really counts is that our citizenship is in heaven. That is our highest treasure, and no one can take it away from us. Our citizenship is in heaven. But it is not a “natural born” citizenship.

At Baptism, you are born of water and the Spirit. In the waters of Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit came into your life and sealed you with the new birth. That was your citizenship day, when you became a “supernatural born citizen.” The heavenly Father claimed you as his child. The blood of Jesus, his Son, washed away your sin. The Holy Spirit worked in you the gift of faith, so that now you trust in Jesus your Savior for all your righteousness, forgiveness, and everlasting life. Now, as Christians, we can say that our citizenship is in heaven. And Paul here is reminding the Philippians—and us—of this great fact.

What a great treasure this is! What a joy to know where our ultimate citizenship is located! Never forget this, this great gift that God has bestowed on you!

You have a new perspective on your life in this world. You know that on this earth you have no lasting city. We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, sojourners, pilgrims, heading for our true home. As Jesus said, we are in this world but not of it. So we do not blend in, we do not fit in, with the warped values of this world. The popular culture does not determine how we think or how we live. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” “Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth.”

A story is told about an American tourist’s visit to the 19th century rabbi, Hofetz Chaim: Astonished to see that the rabbi’s home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench, the tourist asked, “Rabbi,

where is your furniture?” “Where is yours?” replied the rabbi. “Mine?” asked the puzzled American. “But I’m a visitor here. I’m only passing through.” “So am I,” said the Rabbi.

Your citizenship is in heaven. And yet, and yet, we still have some living to do on this earth. And that is important, too. There are people to love and serve while on our journey. We have our various vocations to fulfill - life to live. Paul writes: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. . . .” You see, we walk differently, we conduct our lives differently, being citizens of heaven. We have higher things to set our minds on. What the sinful world prides itself in, what they glory in, we regard as shame. Don’t go there. Our god is not our belly, the sum of our appetites and passions. No, we worship the one true God, who works in us the good fruit of kindness, patience, and self-control. We do not walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Far from it!

Now what does that citizenship mean for your long-range future? Paul gets at that next: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

What will happen on that day? Paul tells us: Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” Did you catch that? You’re going to get a full-body makeover when Christ returns! I don’t exactly know what this is going to look like, but I believe that my father walks again. That my grandfather has his memories back. That we will no longer be subject to disease or death. Sickness and sorrows, all gone! Sin, no more! We will be fitted out for immortality, ready to live eternally in a restored creation, better than ever! Friends, this is our hope, our sure and certain hope! This is what we are looking forward to!

Our citizenship is in heaven, but it will not be a heaven where we are just floating around on clouds like Casper the Ghost, mere wisps. God created the Garden of Eden in the beginning, and it was a real physical creation with real people having real bodies. So expect something like that, only much, much better the next time around. It will be heaven on earth, paradise restored, the new Jerusalem, and then some! In two weeks, we’ll start a sermon series on the Book of Revelation - that tells us that in the end, Jesus wins. In the end, there’ll be peace. That every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Friends, because we are citizens of heaven, we can handle whatever comes our way here on earth. We are standing firm on the rock of our salvation, and nothing can shake that or take it away. We belong to Christ right now, and we are waiting for his return. Brothers and sisters, our citizenship is in heaven. No one can take away that passport. Maybe Scotty can beam us up, but only Jesus can save our souls. And the family of God said, Amen.