

Please pray with me.

Oh God who made the heart and ear,  
We listen care'fly as you draw near,  
To hear your word in many ways,  
And live your life through all of our days.

Amen.

Hear a word from God from Philippians 3:17-21.

This is a word from God for the people of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

As I begin the sermon today, I'd like to tell you something about me.

I've often shied away from preaching from Paul's letters.

As a matter of fact, when I first began to study the Bible, I didn't really like Paul.

But, as I try to follow Jesus, as I try to live the gospel life, I've realized I like Paul.

I have a lot in common with him.

He was a missionary.

So am I.

He was a writer.

So am I.

I realize I don't really like the way some people have interpreted Paul's words.

Some people have used Paul's words to OPPRESS - women, our queer siblings, people of color, immigrants

They haven't used those words to LIBERATE people.

**Citizens with Caesar** use the Bible to oppress others.

**Citizens with Jesus** use the Bible to liberate others.

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

“Philippi was almost unique among cities Paul addressed in his letters: it differed from other places he evangelized because of its ‘Roman-ness.’ This ‘little Rome’ had legal status as if in Italy, with some 10,000 inhabitants, in a walled city. The dominant new factor was Imperial religion and the Emperor cult, which was the faith of some fifty million people, with rituals and celebrations that touched most of life.” (John Reumann, The Anchor Yale Bible: Philippians, 2008)

**Citizens with Caesar** worship Caesar.

**Citizens with Jesus** worship God.

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

“When Paul says ‘we are citizens of heaven,’ we naturally suppose he means ‘and so we’re waiting until we can go and live in heaven where we belong.’ But that’s not what he says, and it’s certainly not what he means. If someone in Philippi said, ‘We are citizens of Rome,’ they wouldn’t mean, ‘so we’re looking forward to going to live there.’ Being a colony works the other way around. The task of the citizen in a place like Philippi was to bring Roman culture and rule to northern Greece, to expand Roman influence there.

The church is at present a colony of heaven, with the responsibility (as we say in the Lord’s Prayer) for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth. We are not very good at it. But our hope is that the true savior, the true Lord, King Jesus himself, will come from heaven and change all that.”

**Citizens with Caesar** want to bring the life and rule of America to the world.

**Citizens with Jesus** want to bring the life and rule of heaven to the world.

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

Politeuma - which we translate into English as “Citizenship” - referred to a colony of Roman citizens living abroad who maintained the laws, values, and loyalties of the mother city, Rome.

Paul takes that word from the empire and uses it to refer to followers of Jesus living anywhere in the world who maintain the laws, values, and loyalties of the upside-down kingdom of God.

Citizens with Caesar say, “Caesar is Lord.” (Kyrios)

Citizens with Jesus say, “Jesus is Lord.”

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

Hear a word from God from Philippians 3:17-21.

This is a word from God for the people of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

A quick review from last week:

Here are two definitions of Christian Nationalism that Pastor Jennifer shared with us - Christian Nationalism is “an ideology or position that privileges the presence, role, and voice of Christians over non-Christians in this country” (Rev. Jenny McDevitt). And it is “impoverished as it seeks a kingdom without a cross. It pursues a victory without mercy. It acclaims God’s love of power rather than the power of God’s love” (Rev. N.T. Wright).

This morning, I’d like to add to our definition.

I got the t-shirt I’m wearing this morning from the Coalition for Spiritual & Public Leadership.

Mary is on the front of the shirt.

Her hand is raised in solidarity with the humble people of the world.

Her words are in Spanish.

“Dios derribó a los poderosos de sus tronos,” she says from her Magnificat found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, “y exaltó a los humildes.”

“God brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the humble.”

Christian Nationalism is the opposite of Mary’s Magnificat.

“God brought down the humble,” it says, “and lifted up the powerful on their thrones.”

This is, as the Presbyterian Church USA has recently stated, a theological error.

Those within Christian Nationalism have become enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

You’ll notice that Paul doesn’t say this with a hard heart full of hate.

He doesn’t want the thing he is preaching against to happen to him.

No, he has a tearful, tender heart full of love.

Oh, how I can learn from him.

**Citizens with Caesar** stand up and speak out with Christian Nationalist’s within Christian Nationalism. With hate.

**Citizens with Jesus** stand up and speak out with Mary within the Gospel. With LOVE.

Citizenship where?

## **Citizenship with Jesus.**

### **HuMBLE**

**Hu** - Human. Look closely and listen carefully. We are all HUMAN. We were made from the dust of the earth. We came alive from the breath that God breathed in us. We have feet made of clay. You and me. We are HUMAN.

**M** - Mercy. Look closely and listen carefully. God sees every one of us with mercy and tenderness. We are held in the palms of God's merciful hands, in the deepest part of God's tender heart.

**B** - Barefooted and open hearted. Look closely and listen carefully. God is here. It doesn't matter what we have (though our culture says that it does). It matters who we are.

**L** - Loved. Look closely and listen carefully. You are a child of God and you are welcome in this place. You are loved.

**E** - Empathetic. Look closely and listen carefully. "First of all, if you can learn a simple trick, Scout," says Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, "You'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." It's the Jesus way.

Citizens with Caesar have a love for power.

Citizens with Jesus have the power of love.

Citizenship where?

### **Citizenship with Jesus.**

Elizabeth Jemison is a friend of Triune Mercy. She teaches in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Clemson University. She is a historian of American religion whose research centers on questions of race, gender, and politics in nineteenth and twentieth century Christianity. Her first book is titled *Christian Citizens: Reading the Bible in Black and White in the Postemancipation South*.

There, she brilliantly introduces us to our question this morning - Citizenship where?

She writes, "In 1875, Rev. Charles Burch led ministers and lay members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Louisiana in discussing their rapidly changing political situation. African American Christians feared that their remarkable political, economic, and religious progress since emancipation was at risk amid "the counter revolution now in process." White supremacists were attacking their civil and political rights. Across Louisiana, White Leagues, new paramilitary allies of the Democratic Party, terrorized Republican voters loyal to the party of Abraham Lincoln. As Baton Rouge's senior AME Church leader, Burch denounced this "inhuman butchery" caused by "relentless . . . race prejudice" as unchristian and unlawful. As "innocent private citizens," African Americans "as a race of people . . . are fighting our foe with unequal arms." Like black citizens across the region, AME Church members merged religious and political arguments to defend their Christian citizenship and equal rights. They believed that the U.S. Constitution and the Bible together defended the equal civil and political rights of black citizens, and that it was the job of Christian citizens to protect the rights of all.

Neighboring white southern Christians, such as fellow Louisianan Presbyterian minister Rev. Dr. Benjamin M. Palmer, found these arguments for racial equality incomprehensible. Palmer rejected Reconstruction's efforts "to level all distinctions and to trample on all authority" by weakening white men's authority as heads of their family. Palmer, who pastored New Orleans's First Presbyterian Church from the 1850s through 1900, had led



the creation of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1861, and he preserved its antebellum logic in later decades. Palmer revived an afterlife of proslavery theology when he defended the white Christian family, modeled on the slave-owning household where a white man controlled his wife, his children, and his enslaved people, as “the last hope of order, government and law in society at large.” This paternalistic family hierarchy was “the school in which men are trained for the duties of citizenship.” For Palmer, the central problem of his era stemmed not from racial violence against black citizens, but from emancipation’s attack on the antebellum slave-owning household’s paternalistic order.

Southern Presbyterian Rev. Benjamin Palmer and AME Rev. Charles Burch both lived and preached in southern Louisiana as prominent leaders of their respective denominations, yet they held mutually exclusive ideas of their duties as Christian leaders and United States citizens.

**Citizens with Caesar** want to protect the rights of some.

**Citizens with Jesus** want to protect the rights of all.

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

Russell Stall is a friend of Triune Mercy, too. He is a former at-large Greenville City Council member. He serves as executive director of the Greenville Historical Society. The week before last, he wrote an article for the Greenville Journal titled “Greenville’s History: Josh White and his two Greenvilles.”

“Josh White carried two Greenvilles with him,” Russell writes. “A preacher’s son, he was raised amid church, scripture and music. But he grew up in a segregated city where Black residents were excluded from schools, libraries, parks and economic opportunity. At 7, he left home to travel with blind street musicians. He recalled abuse and witnessing lynchings as a child. His father was beaten by Greenville police and committed to the state asylum, where he died. Greenville gave white faith, family and music, but also poverty, segregation and violence.”

**... What is America to me?**

A name, a map, the flag I see

A certain word democracy

What is America to me?

**... The house I live in, the friends that I have found**

The folks beyond the railroad, and the people all around

The farmer and the worker, the sailor on the sea

The men who built this country, that's America to me

**... The house I live in, my neighbors white and black**

The people who just came here, or from generations back

The town hall and the soapbox, the torch of liberty

A home for all God's children, that's America to me

**... The words of old Abe Lincoln, of Jefferson and Paine**

Of Washington and Jackson, and the task that still remains

Our little bridge at Concord, where freedom's fight began

Our Gettysburg and Midway, and the story of the tan

**... The house I live in, the goodness everywhere**

A land of wealth and beauty, with enough for all to share

A land that we call freedom, the home of liberty

With its promise for tomorrow, that's America to me

(Josh White, The House I Live In)

**Citizens with Caesar** give poverty, segregation and violence.

**Citizens with Jesus** give faith, family and music.

Citizenship where?

## **Citizenship with Jesus.**

For one who used to be so violent - approving of the stoning of Stephen and being a willing party to the suppression of Christians - Paul seems to have done a radical about-face. It's hard to believe the violent Saul was now the peaceful Paul, the same man who would write the love chapter to the church in Corinth and encourage believers to "Overcome evil with good." He had been transformed into Christ-likeness, even to the point of sacrificing his own life so that others might come to Christ. (PsalmPrayers)

Citizenship where?

## **Citizenship with Jesus.**

After the service and lunch on Sunday, Juniper sat with Tina and Leo on the brick wall between Stone Avenue and the Mercy Center.

Their hearts and their stomachs were full.

"What you think Pastor Trevor was a tryin' to say in that sermon today?" asked Tina.

"He's simple minded and big hearted," said Juniper, "so you never know."

'Well, I think one thing he was tellin' us is that we can be citizens with Jesus in the upside-down kingdom of God," said Tina.

"And that he's always on the side of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner," added Juniper. "You know, the humble who Mary was talking about on the front of his t-shirt."

Leo nodded.

He looked closely and listened carefully and took it all in, as he always did.

He opened his tattered notebook and wrote with his trusty pen.

“Christian Nationalism is the opposite of the upside-down kingdom of God,” he wrote. “And I’m thankful to be a citizen with Jesus along with my friends in that upside-down kingdom. We don’t build walls around the upside-down kingdom, though. We build tables. And all people, ALL people, even our enemies, are welcome to come and be with us as we allow our hearts to be changed from stone to tenderness by Jesus and by each other. And that’s a beautiful thing.”

Then they were very still and very quiet.

They were glad to be together as friends in the concrete hard world around them.

The little dandelion growing through a crack in the sidewalk understood.

And she smiled.

Citizenship where?

**Citizenship with Jesus.**

**Amen!**

Benediction -

No matter who you are or what you’ve done, who you love or what you’ve lost, where you’ve gone or where you’ve stayed, there will always be a seat for you at Triune Mercy because you are a beloved child of God.