

The Second Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2016
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Philippians 3:17- 4:1

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. 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. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But 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. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! (NIV)

Do you know the feeling of being away from home for a long time? Those who have served in our military would know the feeling. But even if we have not served our country by leaving home to go to another land, can't we relate to being away from home and the wonderful feeling of coming back home? Have you ever been away on business or at school and you longed to get back to see your family? Even if the reason you were away was a vacation have you ever just wanted to get back home and sleep in your own bed again? Why do we love coming home? Because I pray for most, if not all, of us home is a place where we are comfortable, a place where we feel safe and secure, a place where we have others who love us, and perhaps a place with other people much like us. Most of all it is where we belong, where we live, - it is the place we call home!

So where is the place you call home? If I'd say to you my home is 7739 Stockton Way, Florence, Kentucky, the apostle Paul would respectfully tell me "*I don't think so.*" The Lord wants us to see a pretty startling truth today. "***But our citizenship is in heaven.***" We have a home and it's not here on earth. God wants us to see that our current bodies are more like rental cars. Our Savior wants you to realize the place where you are living now is more like a temporary tent. Our Father in heaven wants us to learn to live with this understanding. We are to live as if we are not yet home. I pray the Spirit enables us to see why this is good. We are like strangers here; aliens living in a foreign land. As we recognize this truth I pray we always keep in mind that: **We are on our way Home!**

We have right away a reminder that we are not yet home. Paul writes: "***many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.***" When we hear about enemies of Jesus and His cross don't we think immediately of people who hate Jesus and His Word? There are many enemies like that! Such as the people in our Old Testament reading who seized Jeremiah and said he must die. Such as wicked Herod, we read about in our Gospel lesson, who wanted to kill Jesus. Such as people today who can't and won't tolerate anything to do with Christ or His followers. They would rather see them die. They are a constant reminder that we are still far from home. Yet, Paul is talking about more than just these kind of hateful enemies. Many live as enemies of the cross in far less obvious, blatant ways. They might even use Christ as an excuse to live the way they want to live. They see forgiveness as a free ticket to sin. Paul writes: "***Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.***"

Many who live as enemies of the cross of Christ because they live for themselves. They seek their own glory. They believe they can work out their own salvation. Their god is their stomach. They do shameful things and even brag about them. Their hearts are on earthly things. Destruction is waiting for them. No wonder Paul keeps warning about this and says it now again with tears. This is why Jesus lamented over Jerusalem and all the people there that rejected His loving call. It is sad to see people live as enemies of the cross of Christ. For on that cross we see God's greatest act of love for us. The cross of Christ is everything to us. It is all our hope and stay. It is our salvation. It is where Jesus laid down His life for us. It is where all our sins were taken away forever. This is why it is so sad to look around and see many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

It is an important reminder and warning to examine our own lives. Do we ever live as enemies to the cross of Christ? What is our mindset toward sin? Do we hate it? Do we fear it? Or do we at times revel in it – even to our own shame? What is our main focus? Is it serving God in love and living to His glory? Is it spending as much time in God's Word as possible with our sights set on heaven? Or is it self-promotion and self glorification? Are our minds on earthly things?

I did something this last week that I want all of you to try this week. When you have a few quiet moments and find yourself deep in thought, when you lay your head down to sleep but thoughts are racing through your mind, examine what is on your mind. As I did this verse kept rebuking me! ***“Their mind is on earthly things.”*** I would be thinking about the game or the phone call I need to make to straighten out a TV bill. Our minds get stuck on hurtful things someone said to us or on things that caused us pain. Try to see what is most often on your mind and we'll understand why God keeps warning us in His Word above setting our hearts of earthly things. I realize why He keeps reminding us not to love the world or anything in the world. Too often we find ourselves living as if we are already home. That is not only wrong, but it is sinful. We are not yet home. But the good news is because of Jesus we are on our way home.

“But 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.” Jesus makes us citizens of heaven, even now! By His life, death, and resurrection Jesus has brought us into His family, God's family. Now we simply wait to come home. We wait for our Savior who never set His mind on earthly things because He wanted us to enjoy everything heaven offers. We wait for our Savior who in indescribable love willingly suffered and died as if He were the enemy of God to pay for each time you and I have sinned by living more like enemies of the cross. We eagerly wait for our Savior, who powerful rose from the dead, to come and transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. We are not home yet, but we wait in faith knowing that we are on the way home.

Early Friday morning our neighbor Stan, who we liked to call our Kentucky grandpa, lost his battle with lung cancer and emphysema. He certainly made our earthly home here more enjoyable having him across the street from us. It has been difficult the last couple days to look across the road and know he is not there looking out for us as he did so often for the last 15 years. On Wednesday when we saw him in the hospital Lisa was sitting on the bed next to him and Stan made the comment that he just wanted to go back home to die. A couple times I have even thought about how I want to look over and see him back home. Yet, the comforting truth and reality is that is exactly where he is now. We are the ones that are not home yet. Stan is home! Our citizenship is in heaven!

As much as we love coming home, it doesn't even come close to how awesome it will be when we are finally really home. There we will no longer be in rented cars or perishable bodies, but when Jesus returns we will have bodies that are imperishable. There we will no longer live in temporary tents, but in permanent mansions. There we will be eternally comfortable, safe, secure, and surrounded only by people who love us and are just like us. Most of all we will be where we belong, where Jesus wants us – with Him. We will be home! Now as we are on our way home listen to God's spokesman named Paul. Follow his example and the example of others who lived as strangers here knowing their citizenship is in heaven. Listen to his encouragement as you wait for your Savior Jesus: ***“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!”*** Amen.