

Jubilate (Fourth Sunday of Easter): May 8, 2022

“Dual Citizenship”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our text is Peter’s first epistle, especially these words, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*”¹² *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*”¹

The theme of the day, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is Jubilate. It is where we get our English word “jubilee,” which means to show great happiness or to rejoice. It may seem odd at first to hear these words of the Holy Spirit through Peter who tells us that we are sojourners and exiles. It is hard for us to see this world as a place we are just passing through when it is the only place we have ever known. We can read through the story of Abraham who left his family and his home and trusted that God would care for him. He didn’t know where he was going, he just went. We can be inspired by that historical account, but that doesn’t mean we want to really leave our homes and become foreigners in a strange land. Many are inspired to go on short-term mission trips, some even endeavor on long-term mission trips, but at the end of the day, the flesh likes what is familiar.

I know this is no big revelation to you. The flesh likes what it likes and it wants what it wants. That’s easy enough to understand. The same is true of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers and enlightens the Christian to know that he has a home, an eternal home in the presence of the Father. This sinful world is not our end, even heaven is not our final home. It is a wonderful place of no more suffering or pain, but what we long for is the Resurrection. The Last Day, when body and soul are perfectly and gloriously joined together. The life of the newborn babes who have faith in Christ Jesus, enjoy the glorious presence of God for all eternity.

The Christian knows Jesus has prepared a place for them, and that He is coming back. Others might think they do, or wonder if they do, or even wish they do, but only the Christian really knows; because the Christian has Christ. Eternal life has been given to them; it is God’s gift to sinners; given precisely to sinners who don’t deserve it.

¹ 1 Peter 2:11–12

Since Christ alone has earned this gift for all people, it is only through faith in Christ that anyone has eternal life. This eternal life is not just an endless existence. It is a life filled with holy love. Eternal life is to be loved by God and to love God perfectly and always to enjoy the height, depth, breadth, and length of God's pure love. It is to have no evil desires. It is to find perfect joy in loving one another and submitting to one another without seeking to put anyone down or do anyone any harm at all.

You won't find this life here on earth, except under the cover of sin, weakness, doubts, and pain. Moments of extreme pain can bring about extreme responses. There are those for whom we mourn that we might question their faith. We question those who take their own lives, because how can they have a chance to repent. But, take heart, we don't know what is in their hearts at the moment of their death. Even when overcome with despair, faith can still be present; even weak faith is faith.

Then there are those who can see what we see, but mock what cannot be seen. They live with the code that the "proof is in the pudding," so when it comes to death; it seems pretty clear. Look, there isn't much to see. They mock our faith and cling to only what they have known. This is what drives the often now called celebrations of life. There is a drive to call us back to what we can actually see and only from there, from those memories, do they say we can find jubilate, if not even just a shred of joy.

The trouble doesn't end there brothers and sisters in Christ, this is one of the foundational underpinnings of secularism. While arguing for a complete separation of church and state, the state must by necessity take on a different understanding of what a human is, and what a human is to do. They support the protection of individual believers, but not the protection of their beliefs. Secularist groups are entirely opposed to discrimination against people because of their religious beliefs. Secularists, who are true to their own philosophy, believe that the law should not restrict reasonable and vigorous criticism of religion. So, secularists mock our faith. They sneer at the so-called "pie in the sky, by and by, when you die."

But we don't put our confidence in any pie in the sky hope of heaven. We put our confidence in Christ. We confess of Jesus,

"True God, He first

From death has burst

Forth into life, all subduing.

His enemy
Doth vanquished lie;
His death has been death's undoing.
‘And yours shall be
Like victory
O'er death and grave,’
Saith He, who gave
His life for us, life renewing.”

This confession drives our life, it is the very basis of our Jubilate, so we sing,
“Let praises ring;
Give thanks, and bring
To Christ our Lord adoration.
His honor speed
By word and deed
To ev'ry land, ev'ry nation.
So shall His love
Give us above,
From misery
And death set free,
All joy and full consolation.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus is not simply a means of getting to heaven. To know Jesus is to have life. The place that Jesus prepares for us is prepared for us as Jesus takes away from us everything that would keep us away from God. He takes away our sin. In this way, He gives us our home. In this way, He makes us free.

Freedom is not well understood. Perhaps this is because people confuse the two different kinds of citizenship and therefore the two different kinds of freedom God gives us. As Christians, we live as citizens in two different kingdoms. We are citizens in heaven as members of Christ's church here on earth.

The church on earth is the church militant. She is at war. The church in heaven is the church triumphant. She is at war no more. These are not two churches. There is only one church that is here on earth and in heaven at the same time.

Belonging to the church means we belong to Christ and that our home is with Christ. It is this citizenship that enables us to live as good citizens of whatever nation God has placed us here on earth.

The freedom of the Christian comes not from the secular government or earthly leaders; our freedom comes from the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Christ has purchased us by His blood and set us free from every kind of spiritual tyranny and oppression. When God sanctifies us, He sets us free. The gospel makes no demands on us. It is God's gift.

For this reason, we must carefully distinguish between the law and the gospel. The law provides us with a different kind of freedom. Nations here on earth lose their freedom when people set themselves up above the law. Sometimes this is done by governments. Consider the criminal rulers of the 20th Century: Adolf Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, Joseph Stalin, Fidel Castro, and you can add many others. They stole, lied, and murdered. They acknowledged no law greater than their own will to power. The result was the enslavement of billions of people. History bears witness to the truth that lawlessness deprives everyone of freedom.

Civil or worldly freedom comes by submitting to the law. This is why St. Peter urges us to curb what he calls our "fleshly lusts." "Fleshly lusts" refers to every kind of self-centered desire within us that leads us to defy the rules that govern decent behavior. You don't need to be a Christian to know what these rules are. You keep your word. You avoid drunkenness. You stay out of fights. You show consideration to the peace and wellbeing of your neighbor. You don't assume that the rules apply only to everyone one else and not specifically to you as well. You, as the apostle puts it, "submit to every ordinance of man."

In the days the New Testament was being written the early Christians lived under different forms of government, but every legal government is instituted by God and so we submit to the law of the state in obedience to God. Lawlessness produces no freedom for anyone, but only tyranny, as the strong impose their will against the weak without any law keeping them in check.

Law and order is the road to freedom. If you cannot walk the streets in safety; if you cannot buy something and know that it will remain yours until you sell it or give it away; if you cannot count on the law being applied equitably to everyone alike; you cannot live free. Your freedom will be at the whim of every bully who gets into power.

The path to freedom in civil or political affairs is the rule of law. It is not democracy. The majority can be as lawless and tyrannical as any dictator. In our outward lives we need law. This law God has put into the consciences of all people. This is why St. Peter can speak of the government as sent by God to punish evildoers and to praise those who do good at a time when the government was not made up of Christians.

You don't have to know Christ to know right from wrong. A Jew or a Mason can know what is good and what is bad for the country. A Christian may be utterly incompetent to serve in government. Good government, through which God brings us earthly peace and freedom, can be given through Christians or non-Christians. In either case, we Christians are to submit to the laws of the state as if they are from God. In this way we silence those who would slander the truth we confess by pointing out our own hypocrisy. When Christians submit willingly to others they win credibility. Then when they confess the Christian faith, as they are given opportunity, people may be willing to listen.

The reason we don't want to submit to others is because we are proud. We don't like to put up with folks who aren't as smart as we are. We don't like to submit to stupid rules or to tolerate those who are ignorant and unfair. We assert our freedom from unreasonable demands and assume that by such self-assertion we make ourselves free.

That's not how the Christian gets Christian freedom. It doesn't come from self-assertion. Jesus said that whoever humbles himself will be exalted but whoever exalts himself will be abased. In other words, if you raise yourself up, God will bring you down. But if you humble yourself, God will raise you up. And humbling yourself before God means humbling yourself before those whom God has put into your life. Sometimes these are the last people before whom you want to express a humble spirit. Yet they are precisely the ones to whom we must submit. That is not slavery. That is true freedom.

In the movie, "Shawshank Redemption," Andy, the hero of the story, is in prison for a crime he did not commit. One day he locks himself in a room and sends out of the public address system of the prison some beautiful opera music that mesmerizes the prison population.

For his offense, he is thrown in the hole for a month. When asked how he could stand the punishment he said that he was listening to the music. No one can take that away from you, he said.

We Christians listen to the music of the gospel whenever we feel imprisoned by the arbitrary, unfair, cruel, and painful treatment we receive in this life. We don't have to defend ourselves or stand on our pride or fight every battle. We need only the freedom that Christ has won. That is the freedom from guilt. When Jesus takes away sin, he does so completely. He doesn't leave anything for us to do. He comes to us in his gracious and live-giving gospel and he speaks words to us from God.

As he departed from this world to go to the Father, he departed through pain. What is unfair or cruel or painful or just plain wrong that Jesus did not suffer? He did so without complaint. When he suffered and entrusted himself to the One who judges justly, he not only gave us the example of humility to follow, but he won for us the true and eternal freedom we need. No longer can our sins or consciences accuse us. Jesus has borne our sin by his suffering. Jesus has washed our consciences free by his death in our stead. Jesus has won for us true spiritual freedom in this life and eternal freedom in heaven in the life to come.

We are free here in this place as we gather in his name as his holy church. We are free at home when we read his holy word and pray as God's family. We are free in the privacy of our room or in the car or at the job when we consider the gospel promise God gave us and how he has clothed us with Christ by holy baptism. Wherever the Holy Spirit brings us the words of Jesus, there we are free. When we have to push the broom, fix the motor, file the papers, fill out the form, and especially take orders and insults and abuse, we are free.

We don't need to prove ourselves to anyone because we have him who has given us citizenship in another country. That country will never be destroyed for it was purchased by the blood of Jesus and will endure forever and ever. To that country our Lord Jesus will bring us some day. Meanwhile, we rest secure in the knowledge that there are no sufferings in this life that can be compared with the joys that wait for us Christians in heaven. Until that day, even in the face of death and persecution, we exclaim—Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer of the Church
Fourth Sunday of Easter (Jubilate)
8 May 2022

How awesome are Your works, O Lord — chiefly the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Show the light of Your honor and great power to those in error's darkness, that by the Holy Spirit's work they would submit themselves to Christ's gracious redemption. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve Your Church, O Lord, from every sorrow and mockery of the enemy. In this little while between Christ's resurrection and our own, do not let the threats of persecution, loss or discomfort turn us from the joy and confidence of His redemption. Sustain all preachers faithful to their calling, all confessors steadfast in their trials, and all Christians firm in the faith for life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You have provided us with the gift of family. Bless those who have shown us a mother's love and nurtured our lives from childhood. Bless and protect all mothers with child, all those who have suffered miscarriage or the death of a child, and all those who have yearned for a child and lived with the pain of this unfulfilled longing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, it is Your will that every human institution exercise the authority You give from above to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. Give us good government, under which we may honor everyone, love the brotherhood and fear God. Above all, let our subjection be offered always for Your sake as sojourners and exiles in this world, and if we must endure suffering, let it be borne mindful of You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Nicholas*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Tammy and Emma* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, You have not forgotten us in our afflictions or abandoned us in our weakness. Deliver the sick and suffering according to Your will, give peace to the lonely and downtrodden, give strength to the recovering, and comfort to the dying, especially *Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Ellie, John, David, Tricia, Greg, Joshua, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*]; give your comfort to those who mourn especially to the families of Michealla and Buck, may they find comfort in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, give joy in the midst of sorrow here at the Sacrament of the Altar. Give repentance, a firm faith and a united confession, that we may have honest fellowship in the blessings of Christ's testament. With consciences thus cleansed from evil and renewed in You, enable us to stand undaunted until the day of visitation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, of Your fatherly goodness You allow Your children to come under Your chastening rod to conform us to Your only begotten Son here in suffering on earth and hereafter in glory. Comfort us by Your Holy Spirit in all temptations and afflictions, that we would not despair, but trust continually in Your Son's promise that our trials will endure but a little while and then be followed by eternal joy. Grant that we would overcome all evil in patient hope and at last obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**