

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Lent 2 -- February 28th, 2010

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

¹⁷Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, 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. ¹Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Dear brothers and sisters in the faith,

I've had the privilege to spend most of my lifetime living in the great state of Wisconsin. My guess is that most of the people sitting here today fit into that same category. With that in mind I want you to think just for a minute about some things that make Wisconsin distinctive from other states. What are some things that you would say, "You know you are a true resident of Wisconsin if ...?" If you travel around the country you notice that people are very proud of the states that they live in sometimes almost to a fault. I was thinking about this and realized that there are some wonderful things about living in Wisconsin and there are some things that others might find odd or different. Here are some of the things that I noted that would be telltale sign that you are from Wisconsin...

... you go out for a fish fry almost every Friday.
... you know you're from Wisconsin if you know the word spelled b-r-a-t does not describe a child.
... you know that a bubbler is something to drink from
... you know where Oconomowoc is AND can pronounce and spell it.
... you can recognize someone from Illinois just from their driving.

But while those certain things may be unique to Wisconsin, those things don't really tell you much about the people of Wisconsin, do they? The only way to really know someone from Wisconsin or anywhere else is to see the way they act, isn't it? I've lived in Wisconsin, Arizona, and North Carolina and each state or part of the country has their own unique speech, actions and characteristics, too. In fact, as we take some time to look at God's Word this morning we're going to see that it is especially true about a certain kind of citizens: the citizens of heaven. I mean, you thought Wisconsinites were easy to recognize! From the book of Philippians, the Holy Spirit is going to convince us it's even easier to spot a citizen of heaven. He's going to teach us this truth this morning:

Theme: You Know You're A Citizen Of Heaven When . . .

- 1) You leave earth's destroying mind-set**
- 2) You live heaven's transforming mind-set.**

Obviously I'm proud to be a Wisconsinite, but not everything that's on the list of "you know you're from Wisconsin if..." is great. Let me give you an example. Wisconsin is known for liking its beer which is not necessarily wrong. But sometimes the people of Wisconsin like their beer a little too much and bad and sinful things have happened and this is always wrong. We kind of laugh about it, but at the same time we know that it can be destructive, can't it? It may not be too much beer, but Paul here in our text warns Christians about some destructive behavior, too. He says, "**As I have often told you before and now say again 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 on earthly things.”

Have you ever heard the saying that is similar to the one we’re looking at today — “When in Rome, do as the Romans do?” Well, these Philippians weren’t anywhere near Rome, but they were Roman citizens. So they did as the Romans did. The Philippians loved their sports. Their eyes got big when they saw the newest, latest, and greatest. Not-so-secretly they had a passion for pleasing their deepest desires. Everything in Philippi was just like you read about in the History book of the great Rome. But do you remember what Paul called their way of life? Not modern, not sophisticated, not hip; he called it a destroying earthly mind-set.

Now, let’s try to transfer ourselves to the lives of the Christians living in the city of Philippi for a second. Can you imagine being a Christian in that environment? I’m sure you can. I certainly can, because it sounds a whole lot like the way things go at our current addresses, doesn’t it? Not that sports, money, having nice things, or having fun are wrong in and of themselves. That’s not what I’m saying; and neither is Paul. But isn’t it easy to think of ways that those things can bring a destroying mind-set to Christians and their faith?

How many times in God’s church hasn’t money caused problems? When there’s a big gift given to church, we ourselves can get lazy in our thankful giving. When there’s a big debt at Church, we gossip and point fingers at all of those people not carrying their fair share or not being as faithful as we are. But we never seem to point that finger at ourselves for the blame. And whenever our thoughts stray from God’s will we’re living as enemies of the cross of Christ. How many times in our lives haven’t the things of this world and the pursuit of fun caused problems? A fun activity to help us relax can sometimes become an all-consuming addiction. And when that happens we’re acting as though our stomach is our god by spending all of our time feeding those addictions rather than our souls. How many times haven’t all those desires crossed the line? Our desire for knowledge becomes a greed for gossip. Our attempts to solve become avenues for slander. Our quest for pleasure becomes sensual seduction. And when we can’t get enough like that it’s as though we’re glorying in our shameful actions. It’s no wonder Paul says that the destiny of such actions is destruction!

That’s why here in this reading Paul gives a good reminder to Christians living in those circumstances. He reminds us that we really aren’t citizens of that kind of world. No, we are citizens of heaven. Jesus made sure of that by stripping us of our filthy, sin-stained rags and wrapping us with the robe of his perfect life at our baptism. Jesus makes sure of that by reminding us every time we look at his abandoned cross that he died and rose again to forgive our destructive behavior. The immigration papers to let us into heaven are signed in his blood. Through faith in Jesus we are citizens of heaven.

That’s a good reminder, isn’t it? It’s a reminder that has a profound effect on the way we live. We don’t live like the citizens of the world around us. No, out of thanks to Jesus we live differently. And people are able to see that difference. They know we’re not from around here. They know we’re a citizen of heaven when we leave earth’s destroying mind-set.

When we were living in North Carolina it was easy for us to adopt some of the characteristics and phrases that were common to the South. And if you live there long enough, you might even pick some of the Southern drawl or lifestyle. I think that this happens no matter where you live. There is a slight change in how you do things and how you view things. It might be a subtle change or it might be a drastic change.

Does that sound strange to you — a transformation based on citizenship? Well, I’m not the only one who talks about it. Paul talks about that same kind of transformation here, starting at verse 20: **“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, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord.”** Just like our speech or way of doing things could change if we live in a different state, in the Lord everything changes. Our Lord Jesus gave up heaven to live where we live. Our Lord Jesus gave up the use of his full power to face the temptations and troubles we face. Our Lord Jesus lived without sin, yet died for sin. Our Lord Jesus came out of the grave alive. And our Lord Jesus is

coming back to take us to himself. And he did all of that for you and for me because he loves us. And all of his loving actions have a transforming effect on us, don't they?

Because Jesus was shamed and disgraced for us, we now live in the glory of thoughts, words, and actions that please God, not ourselves. Because Jesus fills our physical stomachs with blessings and our spiritual stomachs with his life-sustaining forgiveness, we now live with him as the God of our desires. Because Jesus is returning soon to take us home, we now live as though everything is temporary until we are living in the land of our citizenship.

This changes the way that we look at our life on this earth. God's gift of citizenship in heaven through the blood of Jesus transforms every part of our life. Our income? We can't take it with us, so we are always looking to give a greater percentage of it to the Lord and his work. Our time? There is so precious little of it that we want to spend as much of it as we can -- being strengthened ourselves and strengthening others with God's Word. Our abilities? We don't want to waste those fighting among ourselves and tearing each other down; we want to forgive each other, move forward, and use our abilities to build God's kingdom in here and out in our community.

And, of course, because Jesus rose gloriously from the grave, the biggest transformation will take place when our sinful, weak, injury-and-illness-prone bodies will be glorified in our homeland of heaven. So don't be surprised if people start coming up to you and saying, "I heard your heavenly accent from across the room!" Don't be startled when people start commenting, "Just look at your heavenly attitude and way of life!" You see, people know you're a citizen of heaven when you live heaven's transforming mind-set.

Because I am a resident of Wisconsin, I now know that Green and Gold are the state colors and no church activities can be planned without first consulting the Packer schedule. Yes, I enjoy eating good Wisconsin cheese and I have had cream puffs at the State Fair and I know what the Fifth Quarter is. After all, that's the way people know I'm from Wisconsin, right? Friends, in an even greater way, let's let our pride in our heavenly citizenship show through. Let people know you're a citizen of heaven by leaving earth's destroying mind-set and living heaven's transforming mind-set. Amen.