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Jubilate Sunday – Easter 3 – 26 April 2015

1 Peter 2,11-20

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you, Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson, from Peter's First Letter, which was read earlier:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

So far the text. We pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction. In 1958, the name of a book became a slogan for how many in the world saw Americans abroad. The book was, *The Ugly American*. Interestingly enough, the setting of the book was a fictionalized southeast Asian country — remember, this was 1958, well before any of us had ever heard of a place called Vietnam!

The hero was an American engineer, Homer Atkins, who was physically unattractive. He worked with the locals and learned their language to find solutions to their problems.

The US Ambassador to the country was handsome, but pushed a policy of US aid that was inappropriate for the country.

Rather than river diversion or huge dams, which was what the ambassador was pushing, Atkins saw that what the people needed was a

way to get water to terraced rice paddies. So he and other devised a pump and could be made locally and cheaply to solve the water problem.

The so-called “ugly” engineer devised a cost-effective and beautiful solution to a local problem. The co-called handsome Ambassador wanted to deliver a made-in-America ugly solution to a local problem, a solution, moreover, that wouldn’t even solve the problem.

But the phrase, “the Ugly American,” came to symbolize the brash insensitive American tourist. Now, however, the phrase can apply equally to Brits, Germans, French, Russians, Chinese, yes, even Canadians — you name the nationality. Boorish behavior of people traveling abroad , outside of their home countries, is not an American monopoly, if it ever was.

Peter, writing to the first century Christians in what is today’s Turkey, but also writing to us, exhorted them and us, not to be “ugly Christians.” He urges us to realize where our real citizenship is — we are strangers and aliens traveling through this world. We should realize what the responsibilities of our real citizenship means, and act accordingly. But we are to act with a purpose — to advance the Good News that Jesus Christ died and rose for all.

This brings me to today’s sermon topic: “**Act Like Aliens And Strangers.**” I’ll speak about this topic in three parts:

- 1) Worldly Citizenship;**
- 2) Heavenly Citizenship;** and,
- 3) In This World Act Like Citizens of Heaven**

1) Worldly Citizenship. How many taken citizenship for granted? If you were born in the United States, you automatically are a U.S. citizen. If you were born outside of the United States, and if at least one of your parents was a U.S. citizen at the time of your birth, then you too qualify to be a U.S. citizen — but the catch here is, you have to

apply to have your citizenship recognized. If you were born abroad and were admitted to the United States with a so-called “green card — which by the way is no longer green — then you have to wait five years before you can apply for citizenship. There are other rules and regulations.

Needless to say, other countries have their own rules and regulations. Until recently, for example, being born in Germany did not automatically qualify a person for German citizenship — a person had to have so many generations of “German blood.” The rules have recently been changed.

Until 1947, anyone born in Canada was not a Canadian citizen. That person was a “British subject.” With the passage of the Canadian Citizenship Act in 1947 people now were Canadian citizens. There are, however, some weird exceptions.

In all countries, there are both citizens and legal and illegal aliens. Legal aliens can be those admitted on visas or given refugee status. Illegal aliens are what the name suggests — people who have evaded the legal process and are there without the benefit of proper paperwork.

What is true today was also true in the ancient world of the first century A.D. in which the apostle Peter lived and wrote.

Of course in the first century there were a few differences which do not exist in our day. First off, between one-third and one-half of the population consisted of slaves — who not only did not have citizenship, they also did not have any rights; they were considered to be property, in theory, no better or worse than a chair or a table. Most people were not citizens of countries, they were citizens of cities. Then there was Roman citizenship, which outside of the Italian peninsula was rare and highly valued. Regardless of where one was a citizen, only men could be citizens — women had the same citizenship status as their husbands or fathers.

Regardless of whether one was a citizen or not, throughout the ages

governments have expected those living within their jurisdictions to obey the laws, pay taxes, and so forth. Nothing new or surprising here. The same is true in the United States. In fact, even if a person is here illegally, the Internal Revenue service will issue that person a work number so that taxes can be paid.

But there is also a worldly spiritual citizenship.

This worldly spiritual citizenship is on the basis of blood — it is inherited. In fact, every human being ever born inherited this kind of citizenship.

This worldly spiritual citizenship traces its roots back to our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Paul speaks of this citizenship and the kingdom associated with it when he writes:

Therefore, just as through one man — Adam — sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned — (Romans 5,12)

By nature, all people are born into the kingdom of sin and death, and its prince is the devil.

It is a kingdom of spiritual darkness and regardless earthly status all are enslaved to sin.

It is a kingdom which is a war with God.

It is a kingdom which God has condemned. God has spoken His condemnation upon this kingdom and its citizens: “The person who sins will die” (Ezekiel 18,4 & 20).

No one born into this kingdom is rich enough or powerful enough or handsome enough or good enough to escape its clutches.

But God in His mercy has offered a way out. He offers to His natural-born enemies:

2) Heavenly Citizenship. God's offer of heavenly citizenship does not depend on anything we could do or have done. God's offer of heavenly citizenship depends on what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus.

At the very end of this chapter, Peter speaks about this. He writes:

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth, and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him Who judges righteously; and He Himself — that is, Jesus — bore our sins on the Cross, that we might die to sin, and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2,21-24)

To gain citizenship in countries on this earth, you have to qualify. You have to be born to the right parents in the right place. You might have to meet qualifications, such as points to qualify for immigration. You might have to promise to invest in a country and gain the equivalent of a "green card." As a matter of fact, you might be an illegal immigrant and still be able to enjoy the benefits of living in the country of choice, albeit illegally.

None of that counts for heavenly citizenship.

Sin is the automatic and insurmountable disqualification for heavenly citizenship. As far as God is concerned, sin marks you as an enemy combatant to Him, and deserving of death rather than citizenship.

But what has God done in Jesus?

He sent His Son into this world as the sinless Lamb of God Who

took our sins and the sins of the world upon Himself.

Jesus took those sins to the Cross, where He died — and He died not for Himself but for us and our sins. As Peter says:

knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers — that is, a life in the kingdom of sin and death — but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1,18-19)

This redemption became clear on the first Easter morning when Jesus rose from the dead. His light of life overcame the darkness of sin and death. As Peter again put it:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness — the darkness of sin and death — into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2,9)

In Christ we have a new citizenship, a heavenly citizenship belonging to a holy nation of God's own possession — God's gift us to us for Jesus' sake.

We are given this citizenship as God the Holy Spirit calls us to faith in the death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus. God uses His Word to call us. For most of us that was the Word bound with water in Holy Baptism, which saves by working forgiveness of sins.

But that call means that not only are we to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of death to life, but

3) In This World Act Like Citizens Of Heaven. As we are called into God's heavenly Kingdom of Grace, we are called upon to renounce the world, sin, death, and the devil. We are called to live after He Who called us through Baptism and the Word, the Word of Life,

Jesus Himself.

Peter wrote to a church under persecution, a persecution that was more of the disdainful sneering of unbelievers rather than that organized by the state, which, unfortunately, would come later.

How to respond?

Peter tells his readers and us to look to Christ.

He was reviled, but did not revile in return. He trusted His fate to Him Who judges justly, and on the last day will right all wrongs. Jesus was indeed a alien and a stranger, and even when unjustly condemned, accepted the authority that God had put on earth to keep order.

Since we are citizens of earthly governments, we are to realize that all authority which they exercise comes from God. If that is misused, then they shall be held accountable by God.

Since we are forgiven, we are free from the demands of the Law. But our freedom should never be a cloak that is used to cover up sinful living

What is amazing is that Peter tells slaves how to act towards their masters. Why is this amazing? While there were codes to suggest how masters should act towards slaves, since slaves were property there were no codes to say how they should act towards their masters. By giving slaves a code of conduct Peter implicitly recognizes their humanity and reflects God's declaration that in Christ all are equal before God — for in Christ there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile, male nor female.

All these injunctions are there so that the believer's life might be a life that witness to God's loving forgiveness in Christ in Word and deed.

What kind of witness is it to cheat on taxes? Or engage in crooked

business practices? Think of the former president of Enron, Bernie Ebbers. Protesting his innocence, he went to church before he went to jail — what am I missing here?

What kind of witness is it to wear a Cross and engage in shameful activities — think of entertainers, for example.

What kind of witness is it to obey the laws we like and ignore those we do not like?

In all of these things our old Adam wages war against the Spirit. What is the solution? To go back each day and remember that in our Baptism we were baptized in Christ's death, a death to sin, and then arise in the newness of the forgiveness of sins in his resurrection. My U.S. passport needs to be renewed every 10 years. Our Christian passport, our confession of faith, should be renewed daily through contrition and repentance.

Conclusion. God forbid we should be “ugly Christians.” Jesus has rescued and called us from the darkness of kingdom of sin and death into His marvelous light — why? So that in word and deed we may proclaim His death and resurrection for us and all peoples, so that in forgiveness we may live for Him. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

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