

A good number of you were here a few Sunday afternoons ago to enjoy Rodger's "Harmonia" Swiss Choir. It was an enchanting concert in many ways—for one, Rodger looked downright jaunty in his resplendent new black uniform jacket (even though he absolutely refused to wear the hat—but they are so crazy about Rodger they obviously forgive him that transgression). For another, the music and the harmonies and the humor and the spirit were quite memorable, not to mention the alpenhorn and the yodeling and the coins-circling-the-mixing-bowls sound effects.

The Los Angeles Swiss Choir and their delightful concert called to mind for me a number of questions about what it means to be a foreigner in a strange land. To live in one land and culture while your heart may still be in another. Maybe to live in transition: your past in one land, your future in another. To live as a dual citizen, or at least with divided loyalties.

What did you notice about the Swiss Choir? If you were here at the concert, the first thing you probably noticed were the uniforms, since the choir members entered in down the side aisles, and waited, before they sang a note. The women wore colorful dresses identified with their home states or cantons, while all the men wore white shirts with distinctive black short-sleeved coats. The narrator clearly spoke with the accent of a non-native English speaker. The members have their own language (or several, in the case of the Swiss—but English was not their first language.) Obviously these choir members loved to get together to sing, and they sang songs of their homeland: songs, the narrator explained to us, describing the beauties of an Alpine meadow covered in snow, or beautiful wildflowers blooming in the spring, or a little chapel next to the glacier. The songs clearly help them remember the beauty, the virtues of their native Switzerland.

There are a number of other factors maybe not so immediately obvious from their singing. They did mention that they have built a nice new Cultural Center as a gathering place for the expatriate Swiss community in this area—the choir practices there, but it serves many other purposes. No doubt it serves some of the best Swiss cuisine in the area. I'm guessing that those who grew up in Switzerland keep telling their children, and themselves, their defining stories. No doubt every member of that choir knows the story of William Tell (we non-Swiss need to be reminded of the story: that brave hunter stood up against the tyrant who came from Hapsburg Austria to subjugate those towns in what is now Switzerland, and around 1307 William risked his freedom, his future, the life of his son and perhaps his own to resist their claim—and perhaps to send a message about what those tyrants would face if they messed with such as these brave villagers!) No doubt they have told their children this story many, many times. The Choir loves going back as pilgrims to their motherland. Naturally: they love and miss their Switzerland, and so they also love to get back there as often as possible. (As it turns out, Rodger and Barbara leave tomorrow on a 17-day tour with the Choir. Bon Voyage, Rodger!)

But there was something else you might have noticed. The accordionist was something like 86 years old: he was impish and entertaining and masterful at his music—but the guy and his wife have been married 62 years! Most of the singers were old enough to be grandparents. There were no teens, and there were only a couple younger than "middle age," however gently we may define the term. The choir skewed old.

(Unless all the Swiss choir members chose not to bear children, there are a lot of young American adults, second generation, who choose not to be part of the Choir. What do you suppose would be their attitude toward the Swiss Choir, and their new Cultural Center? I'm speculating. I suspect for those who love their parents, who have fond memories of growing up, they would view their parents' involvement their as harmless activity which means a lot to the older generation, the immigrants. What harm does it do them? They're probably all for the expatriate activities which absorb the time and energy of their parents, as long as they are not required to participate and wear those "silly little outfits." For a very simple reason, the children have elected not to take part: "I'm American"—not Swiss!" "My grandparents are Swiss, not me!" The second generation sees no point in participating.)

Another obvious deduction we might make: the culture of the Swiss is distinctly different from our contemporary American culture. Otherwise, of course, there would be no Swiss Cultural Center, or any need for one. You don't need a Swiss Cultural Center in Geneva!

An outside observer would see many points in common between Christ's Church and the Swiss expatriates. We Christians gather together in this sanctuary to encourage one another, to hear the old stories of our ancestors and heroes and heroines in the faith. We come to sing songs together—songs which may not be, and are always meant to be, totally accessible to someone new to us who does not know the language or the history or the culture we in Christ's community share. When we meet together we regularly eat and drink together—the bread and the wine—and I'm hoping that in the future we will discover many new ways of enjoying each other and meals shared together upstairs with the new kitchen and Mertz Hall.

We employ a particular language together. We try not to use words like "sanctification" or "eschatology" or "justification," but even when we use plain words we use them in ways you sometimes need to grow into to understand. For example we talk a lot about the mercy of God, or God's forgiveness—but until I have become aware of my sin, my deep need, my profound failure—probably, that is, until my life has gone hopelessly off the rails in one department or more—I will only partially be able to comprehend the words about "the mercy of God." They will be mostly theoretical. This is OK—we all have to start somewhere—but it is also true that the longer we live in Christ the more deeply we will come to understand the vocabulary we use.

But there are other respects in which Christ's Church is not similar to any earthly nation or entity. The Swiss are Swiss by virtue of having been born in Switzerland, or perhaps to Swiss parents. I understand it's not so easy to "become" Swiss, and if you're already German or Italian or French, to "become" Swiss would be seen as a lateral move rather than a promotion at any rate (that is, I suppose, to anyone who is not Swiss!)

Not one of us is born a follower of Jesus. Every Christian must freely choose to become one. Yet to "become" a follower of Jesus is very simple (no paperwork, no green cards, no legal fees or bureaucratic hassles) and there are several ways to accomplish this. For one, to become a citizen of heaven we choose to be baptized, signifying our new chosen allegiance (the certificate of baptism becomes our new birth certificate.) [Romans 6:3-4: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might

walk in newness of life.”] In another image, by the power of God, we become “born from above” in a radically new birth [John 3:7] At best, to become a citizen of heaven is to offer back to God our life as a living sacrifice. [Romans 12:1-2] As Paul puts it, we join His Church when we see ourselves as good as dead, to be made newly and more fully alive in Christ. [Romans 2:19b-20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God”.]

Christ’s Church is distinct from earthly municipalities in other ways as well. The focus of the Swiss community in this country is necessarily toward the past, since they have chosen to leave Switzerland to make their new life here. With maybe a few exceptions, their future is here in this country, and of course their future ends, at least as far as the coroner is concerned, when they die.

In contrast you and I in Christ Jesus are always looking forward to the heavenly future God holds out for us. “It is from there we are expecting a Savior—in the future—the Lord Jesus Christ.” [v 20] Yes, I hope you have met Him already, and I hope His Holy Spirit indwelling you has become a greater and greater blessing to you—but yes, He will meet us again in glory in the future. Our hope is not only in this world.

[By the way, our orientation to the future heavenly realm—our conviction in the eternal life Jesus graciously promises His people—is never meant to be an excuse for just taking up space here on earth. Historically, it has been the opposite: His heroines and heroes most aflame with His Spirit, most aware that He is the firstborn of *many* brothers and sisters born after Him into eternal life, have been the most bold in living toward His ends in this world. From the earliest apostles on into our era: as best we know, eleven of His twelve apostles were martyred, tortured. Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew died on a cross. Bartholomew was skinned alive. Later, Joan of Arc came to a painful end in this lifetime; think of the work of William Wilberforce; Frederick Douglass; Eric Liddell, Archbishop Romero, Mother Teresa, Millard Fuller—and Christian missionaries in Indonesia are still hunted down and executed virtually every week, even in 2007. The roll call of saints impelled to bravery and greatness by their conviction in eternal life in Christ must run into the hundreds of thousands, and many of you number among them in your own unsung witness. [I hasten to add that Jesus sends His followers out into the world armed with the gospel of love—not the sword. His faithful followers are normally on the receiving end of the violence—following the Master even in this detail.]

The Swiss Choir calls to mind an extended comparison with the main point in our epistle lesson this morning: we followers of Jesus need to make a choice: we cannot have it both ways. There is no dual citizenship between heaven and earth. There are some who “live as enemies of the cross” “whose minds are set on earthly things”—but Christ’s own are primarily citizens of heaven. We, His followers, His Church, are colonists in a foreign if not enemy kingdom; we are resident aliens here on earth whose first allegiance is to the Kingdom of God.

The believers at Philippi who initially heard Paul’s letter would have understood this allusion loud and clear. Philippi was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia (most recently part of Greece.) Citizens of Rome lived disproportionately in these colonies—but wherever Roman citizens lived throughout the Empire, they kept their Roman address and their Roman identity. A colony was a little outpost of the capital,

intentionally planted with soldiers and civic administrators in foreign territory in order to further the interests of the capital (to increase trade and send products back to the capital, to maintain order, to expand influence) and to maintain the identity and the citizenship of its citizens in the midst of the surrounding culture. (We're probably more familiar with the 13 original colonies established on the East Coast, home of the [British] colonists until 1776, whose flag was the Union Jack and whose loyalty was to King George III but whose residence may have been Philadelphia or Boston or Charlestown—an ocean away from London.)

It had been some time since we, Christ's Church in the West, have needed to see ourselves in dramatic opposition to being "Americans." For most of our history as a nation there were church buildings in the most prominent places, they sang Christmas carol in the schools, and even the judges (all the way up to and including the Supreme Court, which stated the obvious expressly ruled "this is a Christian nation," [e.g. *Church of the Holy Trinity vs. United States*, 1892]) understood our particularly Christian heritage and foundation.

One of the benefits of the rapid and accelerating divide between the Church from the culture over the past decade or two is that we, followers of Jesus, are being called to identify more clearly our citizenship. Are we Americans first, or are we Christians? Are we first of all citizens of this world, or citizens of heaven? There is no dual citizenship in this. With what do we nurture our mind and our thoughts? Which skills and disciplines do we instill in our children, and cultivate ourselves? With which circle of friends, with which kind of family (church family or extended biological family) do we spend the most time and energy? Where do we invest our resources? Do our actions and priorities reflect our citizenship in heaven? (Don't panic—I don't suppose any of us gets a passing grade to all these questions. But our grades on the pop quiz do not change the value of the course being taught...)

[More than ever the work of our Sunday School teachers, our Logos parents, those of you who stand with Mary supporting our Youth ministry are important—the work of us parents in the lives of our own children is important! If you do not believe in this growing gap between our church and the popular culture, ask the parents of our own teenagers or college students how eager they are to enter into the life of our church, how readily they identify themselves as Christ's own. Their attitude of many young people toward church is no doubt similar to that of the young generation of Swiss-Americans: "Church is fine for some people, and older people, it's cool. But dude...I'm not into it!" And how many hours do even our own youth spend at school, listening to itunes, watching TV compared to the hours they spend learning citizenship skills in the Kingdom of heaven? The popular culture has a huge advantage!]

Part of the price Christ's Church pays for forgetting our true citizenship is to lose our relative influence (not always a bad thing) and to lose a generation or two. Local churches across the liberal West have been turned into restaurants and condos for a lot of reasons—but one of them has surely been aligning themselves a bit too closely with the secular culture. Muslims and Orthodox Jews in this country have not had the luxury of thinking the culture would raise their children in line with their own religious convictions; on the contrary, every time a young Muslim woman wears a headscarf outdoors or a young Jewish man a yarmulke, they are proclaiming to anyone who sees

them: “I am a citizen of a different realm.” “I am an alien here in this land, and I want to keep it that way.” I admire people who are willing to pay the price to be loyal to their highest allegiance. (And I hope we all recognize how critical it is that peoples’ highest allegiance therefore be worthy of their loyalty, but that’s a different point...)

[[During a time in history when Christ’s followers were being persecuted, when they were not permitted to straddle two citizenships, the following letter was written, to one Diognetus—probably in the second century A.D.

An excerpt from it: “Christians are indistinguishable from other people either by nationality, language, or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life.... With regard to dress, food, and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disadvantages of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not leave them exposed to the elements [to put them to death.] They share their meals, but not their wives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon the earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the [local] laws, yet they live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are misunderstood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything.”

The quality of their lives together, a result of their loyalty to their Savior in heaven, clearly set those Christians apart from the surrounding culture.]]

Paul is exhorting the Philippian church to imitate the example of those who are following him; He has already made clear he and all of us are to imitate the example of our Lord Jesus.

He lived His life in absolute clarity as a witness to His ultimate and daily citizenship—as an obedient Son of the Father in heaven. We do well to follow Him in virtually any particular of His life, and most of you know we try to focus on these following disciplines for living as fellow citizens of heaven: we pray every day, we study some portion of the Scriptures, we commit to one another in small groups with the Spirit as our Leader; we enter into mentoring relationships; we tithe ten percent of our time, our conversation, our income; we strive to discover and pursue our “vocatio”—the purpose(s) and assignment(s) for which God has uniquely placed us on earth. We also strive to worship together every Sunday we are within 30 miles of this building and we recognize that in serving the outcast we are serving our Lord.

But here are a few other suggestions for us to live out Paul’s command to us; ways to live in the wholeness of heaven in contrast to the craziness—sometimes insanity—surrounding us in Orange County. Jesus laid out one express “new commandment” for us, His followers: to love one another just as He loves us.

To love one another deeply means we spend time together. Perhaps the most pervasive sickness in the culture surrounding us is the frenetic pace—who has time to do anything? We ourselves tend to get so caught up in the busy pace we forget how

damaging it is. (Not only as you slow down, but people will also look at you funny when you simplify, when you downsize. When “more” and “faster” and “bigger” and “more expensive” win the prize, you become conspicuous when you are focusing on “deeper” and “more peaceful”—not to mention more grounded in our Sure Foundation.)

But how can we grow to love anyone, whether Jesus or others in the church, whom we do not spend time with? When we love one another and spend time with them, it also means we will begin to develop trust together. In a superficial culture where people tend to see others as rivals or as strangers, it will speak volumes when Christ’s Church develops genuine bonds which deepen over time, bonds based in trust and understanding. Among enemies and strangers we need to keep our guard up; life is plenty hurtful out there. But Home is where we can relax; where we are known and loved, where we come to know and love others. Part of the sickness of our culture is that we feel the need to put on the happy face and keep producing. Jesus spent huge amounts of time with His twelve, and He knew them way behind their facades—and He loved them anyway, and so they loved one another. We cannot love even the most pleasant façade, a pleasing personality. We may love only to the extent we know someone else. There is no wasting time with someone you love.

The early Church was a hospitable church. Worship occurred in peoples’ homes; Holy Communion was inseparable from the church family dinner; they would eat and drink together, and sing songs, and preach a little and pray, and enjoy Communion. I know today we tend to get self-conscious about how tidy and clean the house is if company is coming over—when we’re so busy all the time, how would we ever get things cleaned up enough to have folks in?—and we may even begin compare as to whose home looks better, and who’s got what, and fret about all sorts of details—just as those in the other kingdom do. But if we’re talking about family, the door is always open, and it’s “come as you are.” The more deeply we allow the Spirit to abide in us, the more we start paying attention to different things when we’re with each other. Spending time with each other gets to be more of a joy rather than a chore.

When we follow Jesus, we also learn to “invite, invite, invite” in Mary’s phrase. Jesus spent plenty of time, maybe most of his time with His team, His small group. But He was always inviting others onto His team. “Matthew—I don’t care that everyone else in town hates your guts: I see better in you and I want You on My team.” “Zacchaeus—you lowdown thieving scumbag of a tax collector—tonight we’re having dinner together because I see in you something well worth saving, and I believe I can use a man like you.” “Samaritan woman at the well—yeah, you who are really terrible at choosing boyfriends and husbands—it’s OK, I know all that and I still want a much better life for you. I want to share with you My eternal life...” And you lepers, and you women with medical issues, and you gluttons who eat and drink too much, and you poor devils with out-of-control schedules, and you rascals who work too hard, and you silly adults who spend far too much time in front of the TV set, filling your mind with the values of the wrong kingdom, and you followers of mine who would prefer not to get any more involved in My Church, any more involved with My Holy Spirit... And you pastors and preachers, who keep thinking your words are for the people out there rather than first for you...

“I love you, I love you, I love you,” calls out to us our Savior. “I want each one of you on My team—to love one another as I have loved you; to abide in Me now and forever. I have invited you into My Cultural Center in Corona del Mar for a reason!”

Just remember: you can’t have it both ways. No dual citizenship.

**Philippians 3:17—4:1**

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.