

KosmoPolitan

Worldwide Communion Sunday

October 5, 2003

Reading:†Philippians 1: 27-30

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"Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel." The English translations of Paul all taste like flat soda here. Paul's word choice fizzes. Now, I don't often haul out the Greek words. I don't want anyone snatching out of a sermon the notion that Christian faith depends on fancy learning. But offering to hear what a man really has to say is a basic duty. So let's listen to him. Paul said "Polly-Tew-S-Thay!" () This means "Behave as a citizen." You can easily recognize some English word-cousins: Metro-polis, police, policy, politics. They all have to do with the Greek word for "city," polis. Poli-teu-esthe is "Behave as a 'city-zen' ... worthy of the gospel."

How does a good citizen behave? That's easy. Grateful. Conscious of, even eager for the welfare of all other citizens, while enjoying various liberties. A good citizen is keenly aware that the polis is an extraordinary entity. Somehow it holds the citizens together in freedom and in security, but it is also held together by them. The city is a thing so abstract and subtle it can hardly be defined. I once played 20 Questions†holding the word "city" in my mind. Try it some time. Who can figure it out? They ask you "Animal, vegetable, or mineral?" and while you stumble for an answer, they know that they're in for the long haul. To behave like a citizen is also to live in the knowledge that this wonder could be destroyed in a day, if you do not Polly-Tew-S-Thay! Poli-teu-esthe is about life with and for others in the city.

So behave like a citizen worthy of the gospel! But where? What citizenship does Paul have in mind? Philippi? Greece? Buffalo? Amherst, Kenmore? The United States of America? Paul was certainly no enemy of earthly rulers and rules, but neither did he make ordinary civics his subject. The polis of Paul's poli-teu-esthe is not your town. It is not your nation, either. We have seen the appalling misleading of politicians and televangelists who claim America as a Christian nation. Are they ignorant that Christ Jesus gave his blood so that no nation might ever again claim itself as savior-nation to the world; so that all nations might begin to find their promised blessing in that which is of God, not of earth? Paul was not recommending that you behave as a good citizen of your nation. No, far above clan and nation, Paul's eyes were set on a higher prize. Through Paul, God is asking you to take up your citizenship in the heavenly city, here, now, the house not made with hands. God wants you to be a Kosmo-politan; so that you kosmo-polly-tew-s-thay today--conscious of the welfare of all other citizens of God's kosmos; all creatures great and small--human and animal--vegetable--mineral. That's what God has in mind, through Paul.

How do you undertake Kosmic caring? You start small, with your micro-kosmos--those at your elbow and across the table in the church. "Stand firm. In one spirit. Strive side by side, with one mind for the faith of the gospel." On hearing these directions this morning, they may have had as much impact on your attention as that hail that fell last week; a loud noise for a few minutes, then melting away. But they could work, if we would work with them.

In the main, do church people stand firm in one spirit? When we are bored, or ignorant, or angry, or feel things have changed too much, and we feel like wandering away--in the main, what happens? Do most people poli-teu-esthe? Do most people behave as citizens of God's city? Or do we make that speech about this being a free coun-tree, where I can do what's good for me? If someone feels hurt and refuses to come to reconciliation and forgiveness, does the church send two or three to recall that one to her citizenship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his commands? Or do we, in the main, simply let them go in their sin, telling ourselves that all will be happier in separate corners or different churches. When our life--our real life--crumbles, and it's hard to face the world for shame or sorrow, in the main, don't church people mostly just stop going to church altogether?--the one place, as Bonhoeffer put it, where it's not safe to be a sinner.

Today is World-Wide Communion Sunday. For those preparing to poli-teu-esthe, this is Kosmos Communion. Do you know what the key is to behaving like a citizen of God's city--having the key to caring and curing like Christ in your hands? Conversely, do you know why so many churches are just falling apart, and so many others drag the flag over the cross and bat down every bird not plumed like themselves, including the Heavenly Dove? The key to life in the church is the Cross. It is the experience of having nothing left to lose, knowing that all is already given you in Christ, no matter what you think is missing. The key to understanding the withering death in the churches is people protecting their interests, functioning not at all as citizens of the Kosmos of God, but for themselves, thus tearing Christ's body apart.

The key to life is the experience of your being in no way intimidated by your opponents, whatever they are--inward weaknesses, or disease, or people acting harshly toward you. So what? O Kosmo-Politan! No one can take away your citizenship. In prayer and meditation, welcome what is given till you see it as gift. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ." What was just words--now dancing with life. No evil can befall you, for Christ lives in you. Now, take up this privilege of trusting him, and suffering for him as well. Take, and eat, my body and my blood. For ""Indeed, God did not send the Son into the Kosmos to condemn the Kosmos, but so that the Kosmos might be made whole through him." So that all might become KosmoPolitan.

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