

# **ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 20TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

## **PHILIPPIANS: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN (PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:4)**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

*"Welcome this weekly transcript from St. Andrew's Church. Last week our government announced that Dublin would be moving into Level 3 of their 'Living with COVID-19' plan, which means that the Blackrock congregation will not be able to gather together for worship for the next three Sundays. However, we were able to meet in Bray to continue our series about how to move forward in our faith by studying Paul's letter to the Philippians. In today's sermon we are reminded that as Christian we are citizens of Heaven, and should live of life of unity and service." - Rev. Andrew Gill*

### **Call to Worship - Psalm 145:1-8 (NLT)**

I will exalt you, my God and King,  
and praise your name forever and ever.

I will praise you every day;  
yes, I will praise you forever.

Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise!  
No one can measure his greatness.

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts;  
let them proclaim your power.

I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendour  
and your wonderful miracles.

Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue;  
I will proclaim your greatness.

Everyone will share the story of your wonderful goodness;  
they will sing with joy about your righteousness.

The Lord is merciful and compassionate,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

## **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father,

The earth belongs to you and everything in it, the world and all its inhabitants were made by you. All our lives we have been surrounded by the blessings of your goodness. Today we praise and worship you, and join with whole fellowship of believers in heaven and on earth in exalting you as God and King.

Merciful God,

you are the fount of every blessing, and you know the thoughts of our heart. Lord God, we confess that we have sinned against you, and done evil in your sight. Wash us from the stains of our past sins, and give us grace and power to put away all hurtful things; so that, being delivered from the bondage of sin, we may bring forth worthy fruits of repentance, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

## **Reading - Philippians 1:27-2:4**

*Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one*

*mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*

### **Sermon - Living as Citizens of Heaven**

This week we have seen that where you live matters. If you live in Bray you are in Level 2 of the Government's 'Living with Covid-19' plan and you can go to church this morning, but if you live in Blackrock then you can't because you're in Level 3. If you live in Wicklow you can have a family birthday party in your garden, but if you live in Dublin you can't. On Monday if you live in Bray you can eat inside in a restaurant, but if you live in Dublin you have to eat outside. Where you live matters.

But how many of you know that there is a difference between being a resident and being a citizen? You can be a resident here in Ireland, but your citizenship is in another country. You can live in a place, but for a variety of reasons feel like you don't really belong there. There are times when you are living somewhere only temporarily, and you are always looking forward to the day when you can return home.

Over the last few weeks at church we have been studying a letter in the Bible written by the Apostle Paul to the church in a place called Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony in the Macedonian region of Greece. The people were residents in Macedonia, but they were citizens of Rome. They lived in Greece, but their way of life was Roman, and they conducted themselves in a way that was fitting to the city of their citizenship, not the country of their residence. But now that they have become Christians their spiritual citizenship has changed, through their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus they have been made citizens of Heaven.

So Paul tells them in 1:27, *“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ” (NLT)* What Paul is saying here is that their residency is still the same, but now that Jesus is their Lord and not Cesar, their way of life should be shaped by the gospel. They should conduct themselves in a way that is fitting to their new spiritual citizenship. It’s the same for us, if you have come to Christ and received his forgiveness and freedom, then by his Spirit you are made part of God’s family and are a citizen of Heaven. I love where I live and am proud to be born in Ireland, but my identity is found not in where I’m from, but in where I am going.

Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians while under house arrest. He is hoping to soon be released so he can be with them again in person. But even if he doesn’t get out, they should still live the same way. He doesn’t want them to only live a life worthy of the Gospel when he is with them. Paul’s lockdown should not stop them living as citizens of Heaven. Similarly for us, whether we are together in church or separated by lockdown, we should always live a life that brings glory to our King Jesus.

There are two ways in the verses that Paul tells the Philippians, and us, that we can live as citizens of Heaven, by standing together, and by serving each other.

Firstly, citizens of Heaven stand together. Look at v.27b-28, “Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies.” (NLT)

The Philippian church was under pressure to turn their backs on this new life that they had found in Jesus, and they were afraid of persecution. But Paul reminds them that in this fight their unity is their greatest weapon.

The Christian Church has always been under attack, sometimes by an obvious strike, but at other times by a subtle trick. When Paul was first in Philippi opposition came in the form of the beatings of an angry mob, but now the church is threatened by the lies of false teachers. Whether from the push of opposition or the pull of temptation, if you are all alone then it is so much more difficult to stand. But that's why God put us in churches, so that we can stand together. It's very easy at the moment, with all the restrictions on church life, for us to drift away from each other and from our faith. But know today that you are a citizen of Heaven, and we are going to stand together through this crisis. You are not alone, you are a child of God, and your family in Christ loves you.

Citizens of Heaven stand together and they serve each other. Paul says, don't be afraid and feel less than the people outside, but also don't be proud and feel better than the people inside. Listen to 2:3-4, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."

Humility is the key to unity. So often we come to church with an attitude of wanting our own needs to be met. We want everything and everyone to make it a good experience for us, so that we feel better on the way out. But that attitude only leads to division. If you want to know true joy in the community of God's people then come to church with a desire to serve the needs of others. Have the same mindset of Christ who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

We are residents of Bray, Blackrock, and many other areas. Some of us were born here, others have moved here from other places. We are all different in so many ways, but there is only one Jesus Christ! Through faith in him, and by his loving sacrifice, he has made us citizens of Heaven. This world of uncertainty, suffering, and evil, is not our home, we are just traveling through. So today, let us live as citizens of heaven, conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

### **Prayer**

Father God,

We thank you that Jesus did nothing  
out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,  
but in a true example of humility,  
laid down his life for us  
so through him we could be  
forgiven of all our pride,  
and be freed from all our fears.

Today I put my faith in him.

Holy Spirit, comfort me with the knowledge  
that my name is written in heaven,  
assure me that on that day I will be received by Christ  
and be welcomed home.

Help me now, as a citizen of Heaven,  
to stand firm, serve faithfully,  
and to live a life worthy of the Gospel,  
for the glory of God.

Amen