

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit Worship

Sunday 19th July 2026

Citizens of Heaven

Led by Reverend Sarah Knebel

Hello and welcome to this time of worship. We continue with our focus on the Bible Month resources based this year on the book of Philippians. This week as we look at Philippians 3 we will be thinking about citizenship and what it means to belong.

Call to Worship:

Here, there are no strangers,
for all are welcome.
Here, there is only acceptance,
for all are welcome.
Here, there are no divisions,
for all are welcome.
So let us worship in unity and love.
Amen.

StF 443 - Come let us sing of a wonderful love

1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.
2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.
3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.
4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)
Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 443

Prayer of Praise:

Awesome God of endless love and wide open arms,
we come in adoration and praise.
Your embrace encompasses all.
As we gather in this place,
assured of your love,
a love that is beyond any other,
we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ,
who paid for our sin with his
immeasurable sacrifice.
We thank you for the Holy Spirit, who keeps us on track,
patiently waiting for us to return to our senses when we make wrong choices,
so that despite our failures, fickleness and faithlessness,
we can always be sure of your warm and comforting embrace.
As you welcome us into your presence,
help us Lord, always to do the same,
welcoming all in your name.
Amen

Prayer of Confession:

Loving Jesus,
we look to you as our example.
In the face of rejection,
you poured out your love and compassion
on people who did not want to know.
We come, Lord, seeking your forgiveness.
We admit that we are not always welcoming of everyone;
for our bad attitude toward others,
for shunning those who don't conform to our expectations,
for judging people on their appearance, speech or wealth,
we are truly sorry.

(Let's take a moment to bring to God the moments we are sorry for, when we have treated others unkindly)

In your mercy and love,
give us the courage to follow our calling
no matter where it may take us;
give us your compassion for those today who reject you, who ignore you, who do not want to know.

To all who seek God's forgiveness, who turn away from wrongdoing, God has mercy, God wipes our slates clean
and enables us to have a fresh start, saying to each one of us:
"Your sins are forgiven, go and do not sin again."
We are free to begin anew.
Amen.

Reading: Philippians 3: 17-4:1

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even 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 set on earthly things. 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 and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

A Reflection: Citizenship in Heaven

Citizenship ... I wonder what that means to each one of us? Is it something we even think about? Or is it something that we take for granted? Citizenship, that sense of rightful belonging, to somewhere, to something, to someone. Citizenship – perhaps taken for granted when everything is going well, but when challenged, or when lost, it can shake the very foundation of who we are.

For many different reasons, Citizenship, has been a word that we have heard a lot about lately, not least because it is a word that we have heard President Trump speak about. Who is a rightful citizen of the United States of America, and who might lose their citizenship status, and what will it mean to them if they do?

But, we have also heard the word Citizenship in our own country an awful lot in recent years, especially in regard to the citizenship status of refugees. I for one, can vouch that the exams refugees have to complete are far harder than any of us can begin to imagine. I have sat beside refugees who have been trying to gain citizenship status, helping them to prepare for the exams, sitting practice papers with them, and often have failed those papers myself. It's not as easy as people think to gain UK citizenship, and for many the experience of living in this country as they try to gain citizenship is far from welcoming. Let us remember, that many who do flee to this country, flee because their Christian beliefs no longer make them welcome in their own country. Their change of beliefs often leading to death threats even from their own families.

I was, similarly reminded recently, when watching an episode of 'Call the Midwife' just how even the difference in the colour of a person's skin can make them feel welcome or unwelcome, even as British citizens, born in the UK.

Citizenship, I wonder, is it something that we take for granted?

For St Paul, the writer of the letter to the Philippians, knowing his identity, his citizenship was everything. Even without the help of the internet he had researched his family tree with some care. You may recall that in his letter to the Philippians, only a few verses before the one we read today, he wrote:

'If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee ..'

St Paul knew who he was. He identified himself as a Jew, and not just a Jew, but one who knew that he was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. That was, in our terms, his ethnicity. His religious identity was also clear. He had been circumcised when he was eight days old; as an adult he had become a Pharisee. At least, before his encounter on the Damascus road that was how he saw himself: ethnically a Jew, culturally a Jew, religiously a Jew.

But he had grown up in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey, a city 12 miles inland from the Mediterranean, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. It was an important trading post, where merchants from many countries met to sell their wares. He grew up, therefore, in what we might today call a multicultural environment. And we know that he not only saw himself as a Jew but also as a citizen of the Roman Empire. Being a Jew, who had Roman citizenship, was an important part of his identity. For only free men could be full citizens, though even their citizenship was hedged with caveats. Male children born of a free citizen automatically became Roman citizens. Women, however, could not be full Roman citizens; nor could slaves, though slaves could be given their freedom by their owners and then receive limited citizens' rights. Soldiers, having completed 25 years service, were also entitled to citizenship.

As far as citizenship was concerned, the Romanized society in which Paul grew up was a complex one. He could have strolled to his local market and been surrounded by a variety of people, some of whom were free Roman citizens, some with limited rights, and slaves who hardly had any citizens' rights at all, and, of course, merchants from outside the Empire's boundaries fell outside any citizen category completely.

So, when Paul wrote to that young church in Philippi and declared that they were 'citizens of heaven', it would have been heard as an extremely radical statement. And for those in the congregation who had no legal

citizenship rights or status, his message would have been astounding. In fact, it was nothing less than revolutionary. Suddenly, all the normal political and cultural barriers had been dissolved; each person had the same status as every other person. In Paul's picture of heaven, the slave had the same status as the master; women had the same status as men, all were equal. When those words were heard for the very first time, a shiver of excitement would have rippled through the congregation.

Today we heard those same words, 'our citizenship is in heaven', though they probably slipped over our heads making precious little impact. But they remain the same radical words now as they were when they were heard in the first century church in Philippi, and in this day and age, when the threat to citizenship for some is even greater than it has been for many many years, for some, today, hearing these words would be just as astounding.

Why? Because citizenship is at the heart of our identity. If you were asked to define your own identity, you might say something about your parents and grandparents; you might say something about the place where you were born but suppose you and I were to take Paul seriously and explore the idea that while we are certainly citizens of our country, we also have a citizenship that is in heaven.

That citizenship of heaven is not one to which we have any legal right, nor is it one that we can purchase, nor is it one that we can inherit from our parents, but is a free and unmerited gift granted us only through the death and resurrection of Christ, is beyond astounding, it is amazing grace. And if that is true, it must surely shape how we regard ourselves and everyone else. Our identity is not limited to the chances and vagaries of this life; our identity is given to us by God and God alone. That is the root of our being; that is the core of who we are; that is the rock-like source of our real identity. Held in the hands of God in this life, midway between our birth and our death, we have a citizenship that no power on earth can take from us. And that is a wonderful, life-changing gift, that we must not take for granted.

In this certainty, Paul encourages us, therefore, to stand firm in the Lord, that same Lord who looked over Jerusalem and longed to gather up its people as a hen longs to gather her chicks under her wings. Today, I believe Jesus looks over the world with that same tender, protective, aching longing to gather up all people. Yearning to bring people close, yearning to bring people into the kingdom of God. As we discern, today, who has the right to be a citizen of this country or of the kingdom of God, what might we learn from Jesus' example, in where all are welcome?

StF 611 - Brother, Sister, let me serve you

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.
2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.
3. I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.
5. When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.
6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Richard A. M. Gillard (b.1953)
Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 611

Prayers:

We begin our prayers for the world, for others and for ourselves with the Lord's prayer:

Lord's prayer

As we continue in prayer, there is a response:

Response: Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we pray, week in, week out, that your kingdom will come, and your will be done.

It's easy to say the words,
far harder to mean them,
for they are concerned finally not just with you, but with us.
Help us to understand that your kingdom is not just in the future,
but something that begins with us, here and now,
and so help us to recognise our role in bringing it nearer,
through the love we show,
the care we display,
and the service we offer.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

So now we pray for our world
and for an end to all that frustrates your purpose.
We think of all people in countries racked by conflict,
famine, disease and poverty;
of all who face repression and discrimination,
persecuted for what they believe or for who they are;
and of all who are victims of crime, violence and war,

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for the unemployed and the homeless,
the sick and the suffering,
the lonely and all who feel themselves to be unloved,
the disabled and the disadvantaged.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for all who work
to build a more just and loving world,
all who strive to bring help and healing to all in need -
We think, too, of aid agencies,
pressure groups, charities, churches,
these and so many others who, in different ways,
contribute to the fulfillment of your purpose,

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

In a moment of quiet we bring to God our own prayers:
[...]

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we look forward to the day when you will rule in splendour,
when you will establish justice between the nations,
and there will be an end to sorrow,
suffering, darkness and death.
Until then,
help us to commit ourselves to your service
and to work for your glory,
so that we may honestly say and truly mean:

Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

We ask these and all our prayers, both spoken and unspoken, in the name of Christ, who hears all our prayers.
Amen.

[StF 660 - Called by Christ to be disciples](#)

1. Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

2. Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

3. Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword —
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Martin Leckebusch (b.1962)
Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 660

Blessing

As we go out into the coming week,
and strive to walk as people of welcome,
fill us with your grace, mercy and peace.
Bless us, keep us and transform us all,
In the name of Christ.
Amen.

Every blessing to you all.
Rev Sarah