

In the morning's passage, Paul is in jail.

This happened from time to time. Paul was something of a troublemaker - at least according to some authorities. He kept standing up in town squares and shouting out about this guy named Jesus. Paul's preaching threatened the temple system of honoring gods, including the roman emperor. Sooner or later someone would come along and start shouting back at Paul. Sometimes some pushing and shoving happened and that would get the local leadership and soldiers out of the barracks and into the town square breaking up the fight. In this morning's reading, Paul is in Jerusalem itself when the riot starts to break out. The Roman soldiers run out, grab Paul, tie him up and drag him off to jail.

They decide they are going to flog him - they are going to beat him up - to find out why Paul got the crowd so angry. Which seems to me something of an over reaction because couldn't they just ask Paul first?

At any rate, the Roman soldiers do not get a chance to ask Paul or flog Paul because it turns out that Paul is a Roman citizen and Roman citizens are not flogged, nor are they put to death - at least not without a trial in Rome.

Just for the record, Jesus was not a citizen of Rome. Jesus was born and lived within an occupied territory of Rome. But I'm going to talk more about his citizenship later on.

Its good to be a citizen of the Empire. Its nice to have some rights when you are in a jail someplace. Paul had the right to go anywhere in the Roman Empire from London to Jerusalem and still receive certain basic protections under Roman Law. He could buy and sell property. He could enter into legally binding contracts. He wasn't at the mercy of the rich and powerful because this concept of citizenship as a Roman meant he was at the bare minimum their equal in the public sector.

Jesus had none of those rights. Nor did most of the people living within Roman occupied territory. If you were a Roman Citizen - there was a system of laws and rights to protect you from the rich and powerful. As a free citizen you stood before the law the equal of Marcos the huge farmowner who is trying to buy your simple land for his own garden. Marcos couldn't just move the fence and be done with it. If you were a free roman citizen, Marcos had to actually buy your land. However, if you were not a Roman citizen - then good luck. If Marcos wants your land then...

It's nice to be a citizen of anywhere. It didn't use to be necessary. Babies were born and everyone around them knew to whom they belonged. For a very long time that was enough. You belonged to your family, the one you were born into. Sometimes that family was very small and sometimes it was very large with cousins of cousins living together in one area, looking out for each other. Still today, in many places in this world, if a cousin comes to you and says, "I need a place to sleep," you make room for him or her even if there's already ten cousins and a couple of uncles sleeping in the apartment. Our family is our first citizenship, our first community. Who our family is - that is who we are too.

The problem with families however is that they don't always work with each other very well. Sometimes, families trick other families in order to get more money or more land. Also, if say a bunch of families living in one place - like Athens, an ancient Greek city - are attacked by outsiders, the battle can be disorganized if each family was its own general. War works better when all the warriors work together as a whole unit. Which is where the idea of a citizenship starts to emerge.

Instead of being Müllers and Azikiwens, the people who lived in Athens became part of a larger group together. Athenians. And then, the men - free men and not surprisingly mostly men of wealth, began to make decisions for the city as a whole group rather than one or two leaders. Citizenship in Athens had a responsibility - be ready to defend the city - and a privilege - help figure out where to put the next well for drinking water. No longer did the city make decisions that were good for just one or two families but for everyone. More or less. No votes if you were a foreigner, a slave, or a child or a woman. You know us women... we're just too emotional.

The Romans took the idea of citizen another step forward. A Roman citizen was a citizen in all corners of the empire. In Greece, if you left Athens then you also left your citizenship. In the Roman Empire, as Paul knew, you were a Roman everywhere from London to Jerusalem. All the families in all the cities were together Romans. Citizenship is a unity of community.

Who are we? We are our family: for me that's "Kitts" and my family used to love playing pinochle. We are what part of the country we grew up in: for me that's the "Pacific Northwest United States," which is different from the East Coast of the United States but not a lot. Just enough to notice the difference. We are often our

favorite sports team - TSV 1860 or FC Bayern. And then - we are the country that holds our citizenship: Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, United Kingdom, United States. This is our layered identity. We have responsibilities toward, and connections we can call on for support in each level of our identity.

Sometimes these layers of identity conflict with each other. Do you serve your country better by staying in the army even when the government is corrupt or do you go out and take over the leadership by force? Do you serve God by going to church or to the mosque or do you get in a big semi-truck and run people over? Do you close your country's borders to keep strangers who need help out? Do you sever ties with a community that transcends nationality because you are afraid to lose power? Do you vote for a candidate that promises to keep white European Americans safe from "Mexicans" and other people of color because you don't want to change the rules? Do you start shooting police officers like a sniper because you are tired of seeing African-Americans being shot during simple traffic stops?

When our levels of citizenship start to conflict with each other - we have some hard choices to make.

But we're not left to make these decisions alone.

Way back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there was an African Bishop living in what is now called Algeria. His name was Augustine and he became a very important theological for the still brand new christian Church. We still call on his writings today when we preach and study the Word of God.

Not too long after Jesus' death at the hands of Rome and his resurrection to God, the Roman Empire turned Christian. A man called Constantine had to fight for the Ceasor's chair and he had a vision of God just before he won the important battle that turned his tide. He adopted Christianity as his religion and so the Empire follow him. Out when all the Jupiter and Mars statues and in came the priests and some amazing mosaics of Jesus the good shepherd. This was great except that Constantine also moved the center of the Empire out of Rome and over to Constantine - what we now call Istanbul. Which wouldn't have been so bad but it left the Western Empire vulnerable. What with a few plagues and invading armies from other directions, the Italian peninsula was essentially abandoned for the invading tribes of northern Europe to run amuck, to ravage, and to haul the goods back home. There's a surprising amount of Roman valuables to be found in royal

stashes here in Germany. Valuables that used to decorate the noble country estates of Tuscany and the city houses of Milan.

Understandably, the local Roman citizens started asking - Where is God in this? What good is a God who can't protect us from these vandals and goths? Bishop Augustine had an answer.

We live in two spheres of existence he said. There's a place he called the City of the World and the place called the City of God. In the City of the World, the citizens love power and are greedy for themselves. In the City of the World - might makes right and the strongest gets the best of the best. Everyone for themselves. In the City of God, everyone is focused on God and God's love. The citizens look out for each other and there is no hunger or suffering. The City of God can not be found here in this world. We know about it because we know God. Because we have read the Bible, and we rehearse a version of the city of God here in this church and all churches. But we are very firmly also living in the City of the world which is filled with suffering. We suffer within it and sometimes we cause suffering for other people. We are broken, we fall short of what God wants. And honestly, even our congregations are imperfect reflections of Jesus' desire that all humans be loved, be honored, be respected.

But it is not hopeless. We may be citizens of the City of the World but we are also citizens of the City of God. We hold dual citizenship.

I told you that Jesus was not a Roman citizen. He was - essentially in the eyes of Rome - Stateless. Without citizenship rights anywhere. But we know that Jesus was not stateless, that while Jesus lived and taught within the City of the World, he was very much a Citizen of God. There's an echo of that status in this morning's reading. In this morning's passage, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem walking a straight and direct line through hostile territory. On the way, various people are recruited to join him and they can't go. They have obligations of place and family, obligations that are of the City of the World, and also a little of the City of God where people take care of each other. Jesus makes it clear that he belongs to no place, not even a place to lay his head, and to no one except God and the mission to destroy death itself. Because Jesus has essentially renounced his citizenship in the World - he has complete freedom to be a Citizen of God in the middle of the world. He is on his way to die at the hands of the World but he knows that as a Citizen of God he's has the ultimate privilege - to be raised from the dead. We, all of us who claim our

citizenship in God's city can also claim that privilege. We will live again because Christ lives now.

"Listen, Rome is going to fall," Bishop Augustine said. "But don't get distracted. Rome is part of the City of the World. God's City is still here and still coming. And we who see it - however dimly, however unfocused - we get to live confident in the knowledge that it exists. "Grace bats, last," American author Annie Lamontt wrote yesterday. "Life has always been this scary here and we have always been as vulnerable as kittens. ...(But) when all is said and done, and the dust settles, which it does, Love is sovereign here."

Paul claimed his Roman citizenship to get him out of being flogged in Jerusalem - and likely being killed in Jerusalem as well. He doesn't get out of imprisonment though. He is taken to Rome for a trial and kept under arrest there for at least a couple of years. We don't know what happened to him because its not written down anywhere we can find, however Tradition has it that he was put to death in Rome. He wrote his last letter in prison in Rome - the letter we read from this morning - Phillipians. So far as we can tell, this is the last letter Paul writes. He wants to go to Spain, but it doesn't look like he made it, and he knows as he writes this letter, that he probably won't leave Rome. Yet he writes,

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

We hold dual citizenship. We are not just at the mercy of the City of the World. We have, like Jesus, the power of the City of God to sustain us and to help us make our choices about how we live right here and right now. Are we kind to each other? Then we are living out our City of God citizenship. Do we reach out - just a smile even - to strangers, even the ones who glare at us on the subway? Then we are

living out our City of God citizenship. Do we search for The Rules or do we search for The Love? Do we participate in the hate, the anger, the fear or do we live out our hope and our faith that God is here, God is in the middle of all this? God weeps with us when we weep. God is as angry as any of us if not more so when suffering happens. But God is still at work changing the world with us. Call all of us, citizens of the world, into Citizens of God. We may hold passports and citizenship or we may even be stateless without any government to claim us as her citizen but we are all citizens of the City of God. At the end of his work - Paul's citizenship in God's city - more than his Roman citizenship - is what gave Paul his peace and his joy. So it is for us too to claim as best we can. We are dual citizens, we belong to God who is at work over the centuries of time and place.

Thanks be to God.