

Lent 2

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“But our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

In the 1971 film “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory”, factory owner Willy Wonka places 5 Golden Tickets amongst the wrappers of his chocolate Wonka Bars, which are then sent out to stores around the country. The five lucky winners are to receive a tour of the candy factory along with a lifetime supply of Wonka Bars. Charlie, the main character, is one of the fortunate ones, receiving the 5th and final Golden Ticket. Thus the adventure begins.

The Golden Ticket frenzy of the plot is not unlike our own recent hysteria surrounding the 1.6 billion dollar Powerball of a few weeks ago. Winning that kind of money certainly qualifies one as having a Golden Ticket.

The same might be said of citizenship in certain countries. With citizenship comes certain rights and privileges that are the envy of millions of people on the outside looking in. And let us not fail to mention that citizenship affords certain legal protections to citizens in a way that often differs from the rights of aliens. Citizenship is often viewed as a Golden Ticket.

While we have immigration lotteries to control the flow of citizens into our own nation, the idea of citizenship being a prized possession is not unique to us in concept or even in time. Way back when Paul was writing to the Christians in Philippi around the year 61 A.D., Roman citizenship represented a Golden Ticket of sorts.

Paul knew this and used it to his advantage as recorded in the Books of Acts. He was also well-aware of the privilege that the Philippians had at their disposal- their own Roman citizenship, which was a sort of two-edged sword. On the one hand the geological proximity of the Macedonian city of Philippi afforded them access to both the eastern and western hemispheres of the Roman Empire. With this access came exposure to trade in goods and ideas resulting in great wealth. As always with the Romans, there was a catch. Although planted in Philippi, their citizenship was in another place- Rome.

Paul plays on this notion of being in one place but having citizenship in another land (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*). In other words, the Philippians were expatriots even in their own land. They knew this, and Paul drew on this knowledge to forge an analogy with the citizenship of Christians. We live here on earth, but our citizenship is in the true homeland- heaven.

Heavenly citizenship is the Golden Ticket, and we already have it. It was given at baptism. Strangely, many of us have gone on our own Willy Wonka odysseys only to discover we had already been given that which our hearts craved- the unconditional love of God. When we realize this fact, we are then able to be free in Christ, to serve him as he calls us, even if it means standing up to the principalities and authorities of this world. Paul himself was a wonderful example of living freely in Christ and he exhorted the Philippian Christians to do the same. "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..." (3:17-20). If our citizenship truly is in heaven, then it cannot be taken away from us by any earthly authority or institution or person.

So often we live life in an over-cautious way depriving ourselves of the fruits of the heavenly citizenship that we already have. We have the Golden Ticket yet live as though we are still waiting for the prize, the one that is already in our hearts and on our foreheads- the sealing of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Remember, it is an indelible mark, and we stress this indelibility for a reason- so that we might be free to be the people God in Christ has called us to be.

Janani Luwum was just such a man. "In 1974 he was elected Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Boga-Zaire. Luwum's new position brought him into direct contact and eventual confrontation with the Ugandan military dictator, Idi Amin, as the Archbishop sought to protect his people from the brutality of Amin's regime. In August of 1976 Makerere University was sacked by government troops. With Archbishop Luwum as their chair, the Christian leaders of the country drafted a strong memorandum of protest against officially sanctioned rape and murder. In early February 1977 the Archbishop's residence

was searched for arms by government security forces. On February 16 President Amin summoned Luwum to his palace. He went there, accompanied by the other Anglican bishops and by the Roman Catholic cardinal archbishop and a senior leader of the Muslim community. After being accused of complicity in a plot to murder the President, most of the clerics were allowed to leave. However, Luwum was ordered to remain behind. As his companions departed, Luwum said, 'They are going to kill me. I am not afraid.' He was never seen alive again (*Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Lives of the Saints*, page 228). If one is truly free in Christ, one has no reason to be afraid. Luwum was fully conscious of his Golden Ticket, his heavenly citizenship. Amen.