



Citizenship

1 Peter 2:4-17; John 18:28-38

Australian Identity



What makes an Australian? Do we have an Australian identity? My 20 yr old daughter surprised me yesterday – “I like Australia Day more than my birthday”.

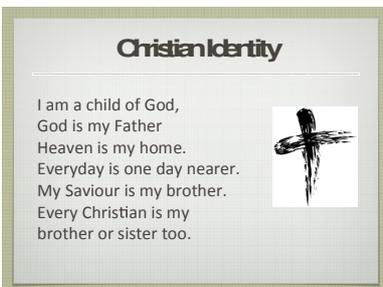
Why? “Its a fun day – the beach, flags on people’s cars, top 100 Australian hits on triple J... its just cool”.

We are patriotic to a degree, but not generally nationalistic. We are relaxed about being Australian even if we find it hard to identify what being “Australian” is. It has been said that Australians would be too lazy to ever have a revolution.

Laconic, self depreciating humour, not taking ourselves too seriously, bagging our friends, are we more than “mateship” and “a fair go”? We are disrespectful of authority - although we rate pretty high in the world as far as obeying authorities and paying taxes apparently! Lamingtons (NZ?), Vegemite (who worked out that yeast extract could be a spread?), unique wildlife – I met an Englishman who was on holiday once who didn’t believe kookaburras actually made the laughing sound they did – we are sports mad (although more in the watching than the doing if our increasing obesity problems are any indication) but this could be true of many other countries too.

We like the folklore of the bush but most of us live far from any sense of the real outback, huddled as we are along the coast. We are integrating more with our first peoples’ history and culture, we are multicultural and harmonious to a degree more than most nations in the world but I suspect as a nation we are still not sure how its all going to work out as we fuse a national identity. And I for one still reckon our national anthem needs some work!

I suspect it might take another hundred years or so to work out what this melting pot of indigenous and immigrants to this land (which is most of us) will actually look like or be.



Christian Identity

I am little clearer actually about Christian identity.

I heard this at the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Summer Conference:

I am a child of God.
God is my Father
Heaven is my home.

Everyday is one day nearer.
My Saviour is my brother
Every Christian is my brother or sister too.

A Christian's identity comes through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Us accepting that sacrifice as forgiveness for our wrongdoing through faith makes us one of Christ's followers. That point of acceptance is our "swearing in" ceremony.

This step of faith establishes a relationship with God that was broken through our turning our backs on God and now means we can be children of God. Our citizenship comes through sacrifice and our identity rests in Christ. So much so that the Bible often speaks about us being "in" Christ.

This is trans-national and eternal. It has no requirements of age, culture or ethnicity. There is no language test and no training required. And it is to be a life-long change.

You can be born into a Christian family
but still need to become a Christian.
Christianity is not really a religion,
although I guess it is,
It not an institution,
although sometimes it looks like one,
It is a relationship with Jesus
which leads to a way of living.

Christian identity is defined by what we believe – Jesus is our Lord and Saviour, how we live – seeking to live like Christ and ultimately, and most importantly, who we follow – we are to be *disciples* or *followers* of Christ.

In 1 Peter we are described as being part of building God is building with a holy lifestyle – a "spiritual sacrifice" – that is offered to God - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ

When we pray the Lord's prayer later in the service today we will be expressing our identity by what we believe, how we live and in our relationship "Our Father in heaven...".



Dual Citizenship?

Australia like a number of other countries allows dual citizenship. That first seemed strange to me – how can you be a citizen of two countries?

Well, in some ways that's true for Christians.

In history being Christian has sometimes brought conflict between the country Christians lived in and their faith. For Christians their identity was found in being followers of Christ and this did create at some critical points clashes with the expectations of rulers.

The Roman Empire thought it ridiculous that Christians couldn't add just a "little" worship of the Emperor to their religious practices and their refusal to do so led to massive persecution until the conversion of Emperor Constantine.

In China, until recent times (although there are still challenges) Christians were seen as subversive to the State because their faith challenged the assumptions of atheistic communism despite the fact that Christians were singularly *not* agitators for a change in the political structures.

In some Hindu countries Christianity and its assumptions of “all are equal in Christ” challenges the rationale for a “stratified society” based on the caste you were born into. Missionaries have been killed by radical Hindus because of their dissemination of what a Christian “is” is seen as undermining both country and religion.

At the CMS Conference I heard Archbishop Stephen from Burma, talk about the problem of trying to be Christian in Burma. The Missionaries who came with the colonialists stuffed it up by being associated with the “destroyer”, as he called it, and to be Burmese is to be Buddhist. Christians cant be Burmese many believe, and there has been 60 years of civil war as the Karen people and other minorities have been fighting the central government.

Despite these and the obvious challenges in Muslim countries where it is not legal to change your faith or where there are more radical Muslims who see Christianity as a threat - we heard from Archbishop Ben Kwashi from Nigeria about the death and church bombings there - in reality Christianity should be no threat to the country in which it is placed.

Christians in many ways should make good citizens, as they are to both respect, honour and pray for those in authority who in seeking to rightly administer justice do so having been placed there by God.

It is interesting that in the 1 Peter 2 passage the progression of argument is

1. our relationship with Christ through God’s adoption
2. should lead us to live godly and holy lives
3. which finds its particular application in respect for those in authority

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, **14** or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **15** For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. **16** Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. **17** Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

If you want to be counter cultural in an Australian context then tell them respect for politicians and those in authority (I guess police and judges for eg) is a natural outcome for those who say they are followers of Christ. Just authorities have nothing to fear from Christians in their countries.

[Romans 13 also says (p920 church Bibles)...

13 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. **2** Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

⌘ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⤴ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.]

This is radical for Aussies! So if you want to be a Christian that is obedient to God's word then pay taxes and revenue and give respect and honour where it is due. And I am sure the "honour" referred to here is also honour towards those in leadership of a nation.

The reference here, as in other parts of the Bible, is particular to the administration of justice, not in the area of morals or belief. Christians can rightly oppose injustice and wrongdoing in the public sphere.

In a brilliant summary of the separation of powers Jesus once said "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Only one Passport



But the Christian reality is that while we are citizens of a human country and dwellers on the earth, this is not our final home.

This is why Jesus in his trial before Pontius Pilate says to him "my kingdom is not of this world". Pilate did not understand – he thought he was solving a short-term political problem and didn't let his conscience trouble him too much in the process. But Jesus unnerved him by his calm demeanour and "other worldliness".

Our ultimate destiny is heaven and although every nation will be represented there is no dual nationality there. Only one passport gets you in.

4 funerals (no weddings) in the last couple two weeks.

Funeral of a 30 year police officer – this is not how it is supposed to be. Death is too jarring, even when someone is 90.

Ecclesiastes says "God has put eternity into the hearts of men, but they cannot fathom what he is doing from the end"

It was great to be able to say that Jesus in John 14 says "In my Father's house are many rooms... I go and prepare a place for you... that you can be where I am...". He is speaking about going through death and making the way possible for us as we put our faith in him.

Bush walking markers on the trees...

Jesus is the trail blazer, the pioneer, who goes through the mountains, across the bush and lays out a trail that we can follow... to our new home, our real home.

Heaven, not a place of fluffy angels and harps, but a place where God's rule is unchallenged. Its is about the Kingdom of God – hence we pray "your kingdom come".

We are, to quote from 1 Peter "foreigners and exiles".

We have more in common with refugees in a camp in that while we are not fleeing we know we have not arrived, yet, at our final destination.

Christians should tread lightly on this earth, not so worried about consuming or acquiring, for we will have contentment and life in abundance in the life to come. Not grasping but generous, because we have a generous God who has given us life in this world and eternal life in the next. Our perspective is *eternal* and that changes things.

Burundians, refugees – hard to adjust –so many things can feel foreign. Over time you adjust, even though there will always be things you miss.

For Christians there **should** be an uncomfortableness with life here. A feeling, like shoes that *don't quite* fit, that things are not *quite* right. There should be an unsettledness that speaks to our future and we should think we have settled down permanently.

So we have allegiance to a different “head of state” and have only one passport really – with a visa pre-approved for entry, through Christ.

Until that day comes let me remind you to respect those in authority over you – including our politicians – and look forward to the day when we are no longer pilgrims, sojourners, foreigners or exiles and we end up, after our journey at our real home, and are welcomed in by no less than Jesus himself.

Amen

1 Peter 2:4-17

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,[□] a chosen and precious cornerstone,[□] and the one who trusts in him[□] will never be put to shame.”^[b]

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected[□] has become the cornerstone,”^[c]

8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble[□] and a rock that makes them fall.”^[d]

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. 16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. 17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

John 8:28-38

28 Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. 32 This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

34 "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

38 "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."