



Worship Service Theme: Citizenship

Helpful Elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

Passport

Hand mirror

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time today.

This week in the United States, we're celebrating the Fourth of July, Independence Day. Around the world, countries celebrate their founding at different times of the year. It's a good time to reflect on what it means to be citizens, people who have responsibilities and privileges within a certain country. And the Bible has something to say about our citizenship as God's people.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First reading: Psalm 33:16-21 (NLT)

¹⁶ The best-equipped army cannot save a king,
nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.

¹⁷ Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory—
for all its strength, it cannot save you.

¹⁸ But the Lord watches over those who fear him,
those who rely on his unfailing love. ...

²⁰ We put our hope in the Lord.
He is our help and our shield.

²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: Ephesians 2:11-14, 19 (NLT) This is St. Paul writing to a group of new believers.

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. ... You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to God through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. ...

¹⁹ So now you are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let's pause for a moment and think a little bit more about citizenship.

- What would you say it means to be a citizen of a country?
 - The dictionary defines citizenship as “membership in a community.”
 - Citizenship is often tied to nationality: where you were born or where you have chosen to live permanently.
 - As a citizen, you're part of something larger than yourself: a city, state, or nation.
- How does a person become a citizen of a country?
 - Birth. The U.S. confers citizenship if you're born here. (Not all countries do this.)
 - Choosing “naturalization.” When you're born outside a country, you can apply for citizenship in your chosen country.
- What are some responsibilities when you're a citizen?
 - Activities that affect the common good:
 - Participation in the community (voting).
 - Following the laws of that country (e.g., U.S. Constitution).
 - Paying taxes to support the work of the country (roads, schools, libraries, security).
- In return, what does a nation promise to give its citizens?
 - Protection, public services (schools, government agencies), legal rights, able to enter country, able to hold elected office.
- I wonder if you know of a physical symbol of citizenship. For example, if you travel to another country, what might you need to show at an airport or train station when you cross the border?
 - A passport or visa! It shows who you are (photo) and the country where you're a citizen.
- So that's citizenship here on Earth, where we can “see” our citizenship in our passports. But wonderfully, the Bible says that as people of faith, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

- As Paul writes in Ephesians 2: “You used to be outsiders, living apart from Christ... But now you are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family.”
- What makes us citizens of God’s kingdom?
 - Our identity as image bearers of God. We are ALL recipients of God’s love!
 - Instead of a passport, all you need as evidence of God’s love and acceptance is a mirror!
 - Connection with Christ. Faith means choosing relationship with God through Christ. Faith in God is like naturalization, signing up to be a citizen of God’s kingdom and family.
- What are the privileges of being citizens of God’s kingdom?
 - God’s unconditional love, stronger than the strongest army.
 - Forgiveness for the past, guidance in the present, hope for the future.
 - *[ask people to name more promises from God: no fear in death, comfort, peace, etc.]*
- What are our responsibilities as citizens of God’s kingdom?
 - Trust God. As the psalmist writes (Psalm 33), “we put our hope in the Lord ... we trust in his holy name.”
 - Watch out for one another, be a good neighbor, reflecting God’s heart and values.
 - Be of service. How can we be good citizens of heaven while we’re still here on Earth? *(generate ideas: we can show and tell people about God’s love, work for peace and justice, care for youth, take care of the environment, pray ...)*

Let’s take a moment to silently pray and reflect on our citizenship in God’s family.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord’s prayer together:

Lord’s Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: Quotes on Citizenship

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life. –Jane Addams (1860-1935), “Mother of Social Work” and first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize

[Are the blessed] those who conquer and take over and have the best economic policies and the greatest weapons on earth? Or [are the blessed ones] the poor in spirit and peacemakers and ones who mourn and weep a trail of tears because of the way the empires have behaved like beasts to devour our peoples? Rather than entwining our identity with empire, we should separate it from empire. – Terry Wildman, Ojibwe and Yaqui, chief director of [Rain Ministries](#)

To be deemed fair, a system must offer its citizens equal opportunities for public recognition, and [not perpetuate] misrecognition in the form of stereotype and stigma. –Melissa V. Harris-Perry, author, political commentator, and professor

Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man's nose begins. – Zechariah Chafee Jr. (1885-1957), American judicial philosopher and civil rights advocate

Suggested Hymns:

When the Saints Go Marching In

This Little Light of Mine

Fourth Reading: “Liberty and Justice for All: A Citizenship Story,” adapted from World Relief¹

¹ <https://worldrelief.org/liberty-and-justice-for-all/>

For many in the U.S., July 4 brings memories of fireworks, grilling out, and a patriotic wave of the American flag. But for some, like Aimee, it's a day of personal freedom – the day she received her U.S. citizenship.

Decades back, Aimee's mother fled the genocide in Rwanda, making it to the Republic of Congo where Aimee was born and raised with her four brothers. It was the only place she knew, but lacked a sense of permanence because her family carried the status of "refugee" instead of "citizen."

After 15 years in Congo, Aimee and her family finally were approved to resettle in the U.S. in 2013. "When we first moved here, it wasn't easy to call home," says Aimee. "Moving here was like being born again – having to learn everything, from language to culture. It wasn't easy."

Through the uncomfortable and awkward transition, World Relief, a Christian humanitarian organization, helped Aimee and her family with school enrollment, housing, and English classes.

Today, Aimee has her bachelor's degree in psychology. A dream of hers has been to support displaced people living in refugee camps. Without citizenship, being able to travel had always been a barrier – until July 4, 2022, when after months of studying, Aimee became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

"A passport means I can travel to other countries and serve others," says Aimee. "And I'm super excited about being able to vote. I like to advocate for people's rights, but I never got to express my opinion in that way." After 24 years without any citizenship, she says, "I can finally say I am a citizen of a country!"

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

I'll Fly Away

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)