

7 March 2021

Sermon for Monarto Zion Lutheran Church – Baptism of Henry Barolo, Pastor Tim Koch

CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

John 2:13-22

Today I've got something special to show you. This is my Australian Citizenship certificate; I'm legit.

I was inspired to get my Australian Citizenship before travelling overseas because I'd heard all these stories of people, though they had been living in Australia, not being allowed back in because they weren't citizens.

I was born in New Zealand, but Australia is my home. I didn't want to be legally excluded from my home.

Citizenship is important. Australian citizenship comes with some great benefits; stable and safe government, a strong legal system, education for all, basic health for all, the privilege to elect those who lead.

Today Henry has been accepted into Jesus' Kingdom as a legal citizen. Henry is a legal citizen of Heaven.

Does Henry understand or appreciate all that comes with being a legal citizen of Heaven? Of course not, he's a baby.

Does that mean he's not a legal citizen of Heaven? Of course not, his citizenship is signed and sealed in Jesus blood; Jesus amazing sacrificial act of love in dying on the cross that we might be set free for life with God.

Henry's citizenship, just like my Australian citizenship, isn't based on my power and authority. My Australian citizenship isn't based on my ability to understand what it all means. I can't make myself an Australian citizen.

If you looked at this document and noticed in the place where it says, 'Authorised Officer' and saw my name and a stamp I'd made up, of what value would this document be? Simple, it wouldn't be worth the paper it is printed on.

But the person who signed it and put the Australian seal on it was authorised to do so. So based on that power and authority, what am I? Without a shadow of doubt, I'm an Australian citizen, and every year the Australian Tax Office reaffirms that!

In John's life story of Jesus he writes; "Jesus came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and they even rejected him. But to all who believed in him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn – not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God." (John 1:10-13 NLT)

The phrase I would like to highlight is; 'a birth that comes from God'. This isn't some figment of my imagination. Baptism isn't some naming tradition people dreamed up. Today, by God's power and authority, Henry is birthed into God's family. Today, by God's

power and authority, Henry is birthed as God the Father's loved child, whom he delights in. For Henry is united with Jesus in baptism.

Does Henry appreciate everything he has received at this point in time? Of course not, he's only a baby, but God will be true to his word. God the Father will seek to love his son, for Henry is now in a relationship of love and affections with God, where he gets to live in a conversational atmosphere, living out God's supernatural love, naturally.

Today God has given Henry the Spirit. Henry doesn't walk into life simply doing the best he can. No, in and through Jesus, Henry can now walk into life doing the best God knows how. All he has to do is ask, listen, and do it. His Heavenly Father will always answer.

I'm sure his earthly Father is attentive and responds to Henry's calls, even in the middle of the night. How much more can we be certain that his heavenly Father is attentive and responsive.

Will Henry always appreciate or understand his Father's responses, or like them? Not always, he might even get grumpy and demand something else, but his Father will seek to guide Henry to grow to maturity becoming a man of courage, integrity, and love. How much more will Henry's Heavenly Father be seeking to grow Henry to become all that he's dreamed possible, made possible through Jesus crucifixion. You can trust him with your life, with your life choices, with your value system.

Today the first reading focused on the Ten Commandments. God's gift to us so that we might live life with a healthy value system. So that we might grow to be all that he's dreamed possible and not lose our way among the devils lies and temptations.

Have you ever noticed that the Ten Commandments weren't given so you could impress God, but so that you might live life freely. Jesus seeks to empower us to live this freedom and not be slaves to false goals that promise the world but can't deliver.

Jesus promises the world; being a Citizen of Heaven, living in God the Father's love and affections in a conversational atmosphere, where you are empowered to live out Jesus' supernatural love, naturally.

Jesus delivers. Jesus sent the Spirit so that we might daily be living in God's personal presence.

I love the reading we had from John today about Jesus cleaning the temple. As I reflect on this account I'm reminded that the new temple is all those who believe in Jesus. The Spirit, that's God in person, dwells with them. We're in constant dialogue with Jesus through the Spirit.

God's temple, that's you and me, all believers in Jesus, isn't a market place. Our worth isn't determined by what we succeed in doing no matter how you measure it. Often we measure success by how much stuff you have, how much money you have, who you can influence.

That's not how God values you; a commodity he can get some benefit from. What a sad world it is when people are treated as a commodity, there for my benefit, so I get some value out of them.

That's not how Jesus sees Henry. Henry is his loved brother, in whom their Father delights. What an infinite worth Henry has in Jesus, a worth he now gets to learn how to live out. Not to exist as a slave to his successes or failures. No way, Henry gets to live loved, for in Jesus he is. Henry gets to live free, things and circumstances don't determine him, rather he gets to live Father's love into every situation. Every situation; the good, the bad, the ugly only provide a space for Henry to live out his true identity in Jesus.

The things and circumstances don't make Henry, God has declared Henry his loved child in whom he delights. Now Henry, this citizen of Heaven is free to shape the world around him, living true to who he is in every and any situation.

And the power to do that comes from Jesus, the one who died and rose again. Jesus who has the power and authority to do what he says. This is the power source Henry can draw on to become all that his Heavenly Father has dreamed possible.

At present Henry doesn't know all that is his. We're here to help him grow into all that Jesus has made possible. That's the faith component; taking what God has said and living it. Knowing that in Jesus we are loved, so we live loved, we forgive, we seek what is best for the other person according to their need and we pay the bill.

Believing doesn't make God's word real, it takes hold of what God offers and seeks to live it out. Believing I'm an Australian Citizen doesn't make it real. I am an Australian Citizen by the power and authority of the Australian government. By believing I get to apprehend and grow into all that means.

Today, Henry has been re born as a child of God. Henry is a Citizen of Heaven. He is loved by God, He is forgiven by God. He has the Spirit with him. I pray as he grows Henry grasps more and more of what God has given him, and becomes the Heavenly Man he is in Jesus.

I pray Henry grows as God's warrior, joining Jesus in his adventure of life, seeking to set free the captives, healing the afflicted, proclaiming the Kingdom, rejoicing together in life lived under Father's loving gaze.

I pray Henry grows in faith, taking Jesus at his word, living free, living true to who Father has made him, discovering life in God's fullness.

Today without a shadow of doubt Henry has been adopted as God the Father's loved child in Jesus. Today without a shadow doubt Henry has become a citizen of Heaven. May he believe it and grow to become all that Jesus has made possible.

I pray Henry grows and discovers more and more of this wonderful relationship of love and affection he has with Father. I pray Henry grows in that conversational atmosphere; asking, seeking, knocking on Father's heart, grabbing that first response, doing it. I pray in the power and authority of the Spirit Henry grows and matures in living out Jesus' supernatural love, quite naturally in his life. I pray Henry has life lived to the full in God's loving presence.