

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

I first met Mr. Nguyen, or to be more accurate, Colonel Nguyen, late on a steamy summer evening at the Charlotte International airport. He, his wife and two children had been flown into this country, and following an intake process were sent to North Carolina into the hands of people they had never even encountered. The parish was involved with refugee resettlement, and the after effects of the Vietnam War provided more than adequate opportunities to find homes for displaced families. So, a journey began that evening. By around midnight they viewed the little house in which they would live for several years. It was a bungalow with no air conditioning, common furnishings, and one bathroom. The colonel had served in the South Vietnamese forces for many years, seen combat and assisted American troops, and even spent time in prison under the Northern regime of Hanoi. Having escaped he made his way home and then had to rush to leave his homeland just ahead of pursuing soldiers who would have executed him, and his loved ones. They left everything behind with no hope of recovering any possessions or returning to a place they called home. But, they were industrious, hardworking, and willing to stretch. They learned a new language, and with it a new culture. They sought citizenship and studied hard with tutors from the church. Being present on the day he became a naturalized citizen was striking. “Can you imagine”, he asked “finally getting to this?” “We had lost everything, almost our lives and hope. Do you know what it is like to have had your life stolen and to be nobody, and then to belong and become someone again?” It was and remains a powerful question! Can you begin to imagine what a dramatic alteration that would be? At the time I thought I could give no honest, personal, answer to that. What in my life could parallel this? But, then...

The writer of Ephesians says that each and every one of us in fact has walked through the same experience. The details may be different, but we who are baptized into Christ have been made citizens of a new country with all the rights and privileges hereto, and the accountabilities as well. We are led by a unique regime with a distinct way of life for being in the world and for one another. “I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to live a life worthy of the vocation to which you have been called...” That little word-*therefore*-is critical. It points us back to see just how our status has been changed, BEFORE we are called to live in a transformed vision and way. Listen! “remember that you were at a time separated from Christ, alienated, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near... You are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...” (Eph. 2) Our lives are not what they once were. We are NOW naturalized citizens of the reign of God. This is the place we belong and which holds our allegiance. In Paul’s day that was dangerous and powerful business because the only person due the title “Kyrios” or Lord was the Emperor. Our faith tells us that we are members of a competing, no, superior empire in which there is no slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female, but all are ONE, and each has a calling to live out uniquely in light of the gifts we have. That oneness does not come from uniformity or making every one look the same. It is derived as a gift from God. “There is One body and One spirit, just as you were called to One hope; One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism; One God and Father of us all... But grace was given to each of us according to the

measure of Christ's gift". So what now? What does the grace of our being made citizens of God's Kingdom mean?

We live in a time of unmatched individualism. We ask what we should do with our lives, our time, and our resources. We wonder who is worthy of our attention and energy. Our children and grandchildren ponder what they should do. Should I go to this school, or select this career, marry this person, or live in that place? And as we mature we re-visit the selections we have made often pondering if perhaps we should have done some of these differently, even where we should retire. We are haunted over deciding what, who, where, when, and how. All this is perfectly logical and understandable in a world where we think we are emperor(s). But for those of us baptized into Christ's body our calling, our vocation is not merely a decision we make; it is a gift!!!! It grows out of our being made citizens of Christ's Kingdom, so it is an act of the Grace of God. Vocation is not the same as career. It points us in another direction--Vocation is what we discover as we learn to receive what God would give us. To live a life worthy of our vocation is to pray with all our being that we reflect that very grace in the movements we make every day.

The second thing living a life worthy of our calling means is to recognize that our abilities as gifts are never solely for ourselves. Paul could never have imagined the providentialism and parochialism of much American religion—that is, the belief this about Jesus and ME. Being a part of the Body of Christ means faith is always part of a community—it is organic!! I am connected to all who are in Christ, and what happens to you matters to me. My father and mother took one of many sea trips a few years ago and found their way to Hawaii and to Pearl Harbor in particular. My dad wanted to visit the USS Arizona Memorial. It seems to have been a very moving set of moments for him. While there, someone stopped and asked him why he was praying at the monument. "Did you know or have someone who was here at the bombing" they asked? My father simply replied, "There were 1,102 of my people who perished here." To be Christ's people is to be in community and connected to one another, and we discover our deepest vocation among those brothers and sisters. We are never called to participate in the life of God for our own sakes. We are drawn in, in order to receive the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, healing, and love in order to serve. This is what it looks like to be and live as a citizen of the country inhabited by the people of God. Paul says we receive grace to be this way by the measure of Christ's gift, not our own. Christ's gift of grace is measureless; inexhaustible, and so we should not be surprised that what God calls us to do may seem beyond imagining, not that somehow the ability to do it is provided. Can you imagine such a thing?

Finally, living a life worthy of vocation is to become—Christified, if I may make up a word. As Frederick Buechner commented, "God was making a body for Christ, Paul said. Christ didn't have a regular body anymore, so God was making him one out of anybody he could find who looked as if he or she might just possibly do. He was using other people's hands to be Christ's hands and other people's feet to be Christ's feet, and when there was someplace where Christ was needed in a hurry and needed bad, he put the finger on some maybe not all that innocent bystander and got that person to go and be Christ in that place for lack of anybody better. That is what vocation looks like in the Kingdom of God—being who God has decided we shall be. Can you imagine being a citizen of such a place? Well, look around you; you are! Amen+