

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 18th October 2020

Sunday Worship

Hello, I hope you and your loved ones are keeping well. This Sunday, we will focus on the assigned Gospel reading, Matthew 22:15-22. In this passage, religious leaders seek to entrap Jesus with a question about allegiance to the emperor and to God. Jesus then counters with a carefully worded answer: give to each what they are due. The leaders are amazed at his teaching and they leave him alone – for now.

A gathering prayer

God of yesterday, today and for ever,
we gather as your people today
and offer you the longings of our hearts.
Grant us courage by your Spirit,
that we might inspire others to follow your way
and seek the values of your kingdom. **Amen.**

Psalm 96:1-9

- ¹ O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- ⁶ Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- ⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- ⁹ Worship the Lord in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Hymn Christ is the King! O friends rejoice (R&S 571)

Christ is the King! O friends rejoice;
brothers and sisters, with one voice
tell all the earth he is your choice:

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

O magnify the Lord, and raise
anthems of joy and holy praise
for Christ's brave saints of ancient days:

Christ through all ages is the same:
place the same hope in his great name,
with the same faith his word proclaim:

Let Love's unconquerable might
your scattered companies unite
in service to the Lord of light:

So shall God's will on earth be done,
new lamps be lit, new tasks begun,
and the whole Church at last be one:

G. K. A. Bell (1883-1958)
© Oxford University Press

A prayer of confession

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God,
sometimes we defile God's image by the way we live,
by what we say and what we do.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God,
sometimes we ignore God's image in others,
and belittle them by our words and actions.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God,
sometimes we hide God's image from others,
by pretending that we know best.

Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us, and renew your image stamped on us,
that we may be more like you in living and loving.

Amen.

Overwhelmed once more by the mercy and grace of our loving God,
we bring before him our prayer of praise and thanksgiving:

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

For those who established our faith,
who spoke out, who shared their experiences,
who faced challenges and danger:

Thank you, God.

For those who shared their faith with us,
who played a part in bringing us to know you,
who have nurtured our faith and loved us:

Thank you, God.

For those who are part of our community of believers,
those we know well and those we could know better,
those whom we support and those who support us:

Thank you, God.

For Christian leaders of all traditions,
for their example, their teaching, their prayerfulness and care.

Thank you, God.

Amen.

Epistle Reading**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (NRSV)***Salutation*

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example

²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters^[a] beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions^[b] report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Gospel Reading**Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV)***The Question about Paying Taxes*

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' ²¹They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Reflection

In our Gospel reading today, we have what is the first of three conflict stories where the tensions between Jesus and various alliances of religious leaders intensifies. By the end of this chapter in Matthew, the situation is changed and no further dialogue is possible: *'no one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions'* (22:46).

In this first test, it is the Pharisees who attempt to entangle Jesus in his speech. We note that this is described as a 'plot' and perhaps this reminds the reader of the plan to kill Jesus in Matthew 12:14 and certainly, it heightens the sense that Jesus is facing intense opposition here. The Pharisees try to trap him by firstly flattering Jesus as they pretend to be genuine and sincere in their motives and their method. Next, they ask him a question that they assume will present Jesus with the same sort of dilemma that he had inflicted upon the chief priests (Matthew 21:24-6):

²⁴Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?"' ²⁶But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.'

Anyway, it is his turn now! Jesus must either lose favour with the many ordinary people who are fascinated by his message and ministry by supporting the oppressive taxation system of the Roman occupiers or he must suffer the indignation of the Herodians who were loyal to Herod and allies of Rome, by opposing it.

Of course, as ever, Jesus easily discerns their malice and their test. He asks for a Roman coin and he answers their question. As one commentator helpfully explains these 'coins were handheld billboards of imperial propaganda with busts of imperial figures and inscriptions. Jesus' clever answer avoids the 'either/or' answer his opponents were seeking.' Jesus is a person of integrity and he answers those of questionable character without fear. He supports the payment of Roman taxes for the exact same reason that he agrees to pay taxes to the corrupt Temple and urges his followers to travel an extra, second mile with one who forces them to go one mile (5:41). For Jesus, how just the tax is, is not the point. And I think his actual point might also speak to us. The point is that those who give to God their heart and soul and mind (22:37) are able to love even their enemies and to bless those who persecute them (5:44). They live with their hearts fixed on their treasure in heaven, they are not particularly concerned with the loss of money in this life and so they give Caesar his worthless coins and they give God everything that counts. Faithful, loyal, devoted, loving, serving hearts and souls and minds given to God and his kingdom of justice and peace are to be the focus of how we disciples live our lives. Amen.

Our prayers of intercession

Loving God, we thank you for all who respond
to your call to work as a result of their faith.
We pray for those who are inspired to work
in countries other than their own,
and we call to mind the agencies they may work for:
Christian Aid, Operation Agri, Commitment for Life,
the Leprosy Mission, the Helwel Trust and others in our thoughts...
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We give thanks for those whose labour
is prompted by love of you and of their neighbours.
We pray for those who work in health care,
those who look after people in residential care,
those who support their families.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We give you thanks for those whose endurance
is inspired by their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.
We pray for those who struggle through poverty or injustice,
for those who are persecuted for their faith,
who have been tortured and imprisoned.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We give thanks for doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights many are restored to health.
We pray for all who are affected by coronavirus,
through loss, illness, isolation or anxiety,
that they may find comfort, relief and recovery:
We pray for those who are guiding our nation at this time
and shaping national and regional policies, that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those close to us. We pray for all those who are part of our Church and especially for those who are in need. We pray that you will watch over them, keep them in your love and bless them.

We pray for Janet, William, and daughters, Jessica and Lucy, following the sad loss of Frank. May the whole family sense God's comfort, peace and love in this difficult time of grief.

We pray for Stephen and his family following the sad loss of his Father. We think of them and pray that they would know the comforting presence of God.

We pray for Netty as she continues with her recuperation. We pray for a full and speedy recovery and for your blessing upon her, Alan and the family.

We pray for Christine as she continues her recovery in the home, following her fall. May Christine know God's love and blessing at this time.

We pray for Richard and Marjorie Havers, Eddie and Audrey Naylor, Joan Cross and Chikondi Midgley, who are all facing challenges with their health at the moment. May they know God's peace and healing presence in this time of need.

Here is a moment for our own prayers.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.
 In Jesus' name,
Amen.

The 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. Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn O for a thousand tongues to sing (R&S 285)

O for a thousand tongues to sing
 my great Redeemer's praise,
 the glories of my God and King,
 the triumphs of his grace.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
 that bids our sorrows cease;
 'tis music in the sinner's ears,
 'tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
 he sets the prisoner free;
 his blood can make the foulest clean,
 his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice
 new life the dead receive;
 the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
 the humble poor believe.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
 your loosened tongues employ;
 ye blind, behold your Saviour come;
 and leap, ye lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God,
 assist me to proclaim,
 to spread through all the earth abroad
 the honours of thy name.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

A sending out prayer

Inspiring God,
 we pray for grace to enjoy the blessings of your world;
 for discernment to know when to speak out for the values of your kingdom;
 for wisdom to know when compromise is the most fruitful way;
 for courage for when we must make a stand.
 And at all times we pray for the presence of the Spirit
 to guide, inspire and empower us, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Blessing

And may the blessing of almighty God,
 Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
 be upon us and all those we love, this day and always.

Amen.

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
 be with us all,
 for evermore.
 Amen.**

May God bless you all richly,
 With our love and best wishes to you and your families,

Neil

Resources taken and adapted from *ROOTS for Churches Limited*.

Christ Church's CCLI licence number is 181784.

The Bible reading is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.