

Sunday 18th October 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

The service this week moves on to Matthew 22: 15-22. Jewish leaders seek to entrap Jesus with a question about allegiance to the emperor and to God. Jesus counters with a carefully worded answer: give to each what they are due. The leaders are amazed at his teaching and leave him alone – for now. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

A gathering prayer

May the grace of God be among us,
and the peace of God be on our hearts.

Amen.

A prayer of confession

Forgive us, dear Lord,
when we have short-changed you and those around us:
when the world's values have been imprinted on our lives
and not the face of your Son.

Forgive us and challenge us to live with integrity
and to serve you in humility and trust.

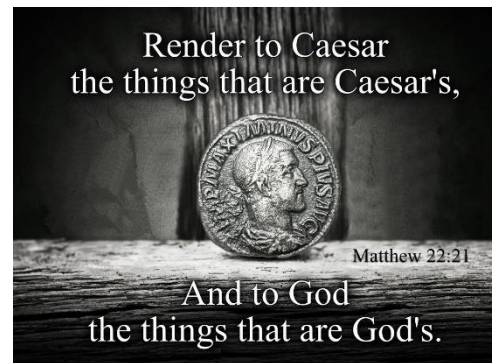
We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Our Father

Song Faithful one (Robin Mark)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxviwvjyg1w>



Matthew 22: 15-22 - Paying the poll-tax to Caesar

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll-tax^[a] to Caesar or not?'

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

²¹ 'Caesar's,' they replied.

Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'

²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. (NIVUK)

Footnotes:

- a. **Matthew 22:17** A special tax levied on subject peoples, not on Roman citizens

Two sides of the same coin – Matthew 22: 15-22

One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is that financial systems and money can dominate the daily news like never before, so it is not a bad time to look to Jesus to see what he might have to say about money and our relationship to it. For most of us, me included, the technicalities of the global finance systems and what's going on with them at present is a bit beyond me.

As human beings we look for something to trust and believe in. Perhaps we can hear something in what Jesus has to say about money in answer to the questioning by the Pharisees in this passage. The Pharisees are not, of course, much interested in Jesus' views about money. They are trying to get rid of him, so they just want to trap him into saying something that will get him into trouble. They think they have set the perfect trap here. "What do you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" We are talking about the emperor of a very unpopular foreign occupation power, so if Jesus says, "Yes, pay the taxes," he will find himself unpopular with a large percentage of the ordinary people. But if he says, "No, don't pay the taxes," he will bring down the power of Rome on his head. The perfect trap. Only when Jesus springs the trap, it is his inquisitors that get caught in it.

"Show me the coin used for the tax." And the Pharisees produce the coin. Snap! They are caught already. This incident took place in the temple precinct; a sacred place. The Roman coin with the image of the emperor and the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, high priest," was considered blasphemous by faithful Jews. Jesus is not letting them off the hook. "Whose head is this, and whose title?" he asks. "Come on, say it. Name before everybody the blasphemous graven image you have brought into the temple." "Caesar's," they guiltily reply.

"Well," says Jesus. "If this blasphemy belongs to Caesar, you take it out of here and give it to Caesar. But give to God what belongs to God." There are images in both halves of what Jesus says. Caesar has required that his image be imprinted on the coins, but God has imprinted his image on us human beings. One image is blasphemous; the other image is to the glory of God. There is no law against tossing back to Caesar the blasphemous image that belongs to him, but the meaning and purpose of life is in uncovering and offering to God the glorious image which has been imprinted on us.

There is, in Jesus's answer, a recognition that we are going to have to deal with money sometimes. We cannot flee the world and have nothing to do with its economy or its systems of trade and finance. We do have to deal with money, but we don't have to make a "golden calf" of it and give ourselves over to it. In the new covenant, we have a commitment to resist the legitimising of greed, selfishness, and exploitation. And if they are the very things on which the global financial systems are built, then our call is to untangle ourselves from it as much as we can.

Our commitment to Jesus Christ acknowledges the call to offer ourselves wholly to God and to one another. And as we consider that, perhaps we can hear Jesus saying, "Whose image is this on this life? The image of God, no less. So take your beautiful and wonderful self, this

reflection of the glory of God, and offer yourself to the God who has made you so lovingly, and in God, give yourselves to one another and to the world for the life of the world. Even a challenging economy has no place for selfless generous giving or for the love that casts out all fear. But the economy of God is built only on love and generous giving, and it is to the economy of God that we are called to give ourselves.

And let's commit ourselves to supporting one another in disentangling ourselves, tossing back what belongs to Caesar, and offering ourselves wholly to God, and to trusting God to hold us when things around us seem so uncertain.

Prayers of intercession

God of all, we pray for those who have too little money:
for those who are hungry, those denied healthcare,
those unable to provide for their families, those in debt.

**May they be enriched and enabled
and may they know your love.**

We pray for those for whom too much money
brings loneliness, apathy and a sense of superiority.

**May they be cherished and challenged
and may they know your love.**

We pray for those who worship money,
for those tempted to steal or to deceive.

**May they be transformed and trusted
and may they know your love.**

We pray for those reluctant to share their money,
for those who avoid paying taxes,
for those tempted not to declare their earnings.

**May they be mindful and ministered to
and may they know your love.**

We pray for our churches, and for ourselves,
that we may live, give and share in your name
and to your glory.

Amen.

Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .

Song Here is love, vast as the ocean (Robin Mark)

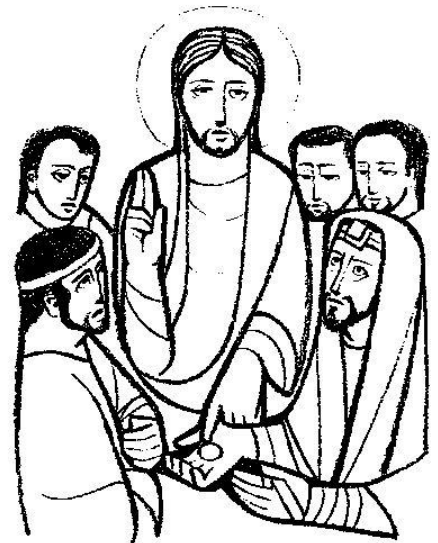
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8YOPj5TnUM>

HOLY COMMUNION Prayer of Thanksgiving – Matthew 22: 15-22

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you love justice and strengthen the upright,

and you have shown us your goodness.

In your child, Jesus, you have come to us in person,
teaching us your ways in sincerity and truth.
In him we have learned to give to you all that is yours —
the work of faith, the labour of love, and a steadfast hope.
Though his enemies put him to death,
you raised him from the dead
and through the power of his gospel in the Holy Spirit
you have given us mercy and rest.



***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.***

The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast.
I Corinthians 5:7

The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia.*

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

Prayer after Communion

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son.

God with us, you have fed us with yourself and strengthened us for journeying ahead.

God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin and refashion us by grace.

Benediction

And may the glory of God's goodness be revealed to you;
May the grace and peace of Jesus Christ take root in you;
And may the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fill you with joy.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

