



Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020: Trinity 19 9(Proper 24) - Matthew 22.15-22

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

#### HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[I Will Offer Up My Life](#)

[Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun](#)

[Great is the Lord](#)

[Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken](#)

[I Could Sing of Your Love Forever \(Over the Mountains the and Sea\)](#)

There are also hymns here from St Martin's in the Field:

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/hub/asset/hymns-and-choral-music>

#### GATHERING BEFORE GOD

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Faithful Lord,  
whose steadfast love never ceases  
and whose mercies never come to an end:  
grant us the grace to trust you  
and to receive the gifts of your love,  
new every morning,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

#### REFLECTION

Breathe slowly and deeply.  
Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

**BIBLE READING:** Matthew 22.15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So 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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They 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.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

*Read through the passage once. Read it quietly out loud but say each word out loud.*

*Try and take note of any words or phrases that strike you.*

*Say that word or phrase quietly out loud or underline it with a pen.*

*Read the passage a second time.*

*As you read, think about how the word or phrase you notice might speak to you today.*

*After you have read the passage again, sit in silence and try and come up with a sentence or two that sums up what you think the word or phrase means for you today.*

*Read the passage a third time and prayerfully think about what Christ has said to you.*

**SOME THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:**

**The Things that are God's.**

What has happened just before this event in the ministry of Jesus helps us to understand the encounter between Jesus and the religious authorities.

If you flick a few pages back in your Bibles (to Matt. 21.1 ff) you will find the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. After the jubilation of the crowds Jesus goes to the Temple and overturns the established order of things (and overturns the money-changers' tables). King David had forbidden the blind and the lame to enter the Temple courts - now they come and Christ heals them (Matt.21.14).

Then Jesus curses a fig tree - basically a parable acted out: fig trees in the Hebrew Bible always represented Israel; so Jesus is pronouncing judgement on Israel's attitude (Matt.21.18ff)

Jesus then heads to the temple courts to teach people, when the Temple authorities come to Christ and asked him just who he thinks he is. Jesus has just ridden into Jerusalem in a manner that means he is proclaiming himself to be the Messiah; then he has gone into the Temple and acted like he is in charge there; and then he has pronounced judgement on Israel through parabolic action. Jesus responds to the question of just who he thinks he is by asking them a question in return, a question that makes them look silly in front of the crowds (Matt21.23ff).

Jesus then tells three parables - all of them are about how Jesus' presence, the incarnation, has brought about a crisis. Not a bad crisis, but a crisis in the sense of the word that means that there is now a time to act, a time for change, a time when the kingdom of God has arrived, God has drawn near, and so the invite to be involved in the kingdom is extended to all: even to the losers, left-outs, left-behind, and the lost.

It would seem that the Pharisees get their heads together to come up with a plan: they want to trick this Messiah who rides into Jerusalem and draws crowds, this usurper of the Temple order who heals the blind and the lame and allows children to cry out that he is the Messiah; this judgement pronouncing miracle worker whose questions leave them looking silly; this teacher who confidentially asserts that God is inviting outsiders, aliens, sinners, and the destitute to the great heavenly banquet where all are invited and the only ones who are excluded are those who can't be bothered to dress themselves in the appropriate party frock - clothing that presumably has been provided by the king in the first place as all the left-outs and left-behinds wouldn't have owned anything but filthy rags in Jesus' story anyway. This time the Pharisees will do their research, get it right and trap Jesus.

Like all clever plans, it is simple really: they ask Jesus if he thinks it is right to pay taxes to the Emperor or not.

Jesus has two choices:

If Jesus says that you should pay taxes to the Emperor then he is going to look bad in front of the Jewish crowd. He will, in effect, be saying that it is okay to support an oppressive regime.

Alternatively, if Jesus says you shouldn't pay taxes then he can be arrested and executed quickly as a traitor to Rome. Either way Jesus' ministry will fail.

Jesus asks for a coin.

A denarius had the head of Emperor Tiberius on it in much the same way the coins in your pocket, if you have any, have the head of the Queen on it. A denarius also had an inscription to go along with the portrait of Tiberius: it said, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus". Another way to phrase that would be, "Tiberius Caesar, son of god." The tension is mounting: the Son of God asks for a coin that is inscribed with a portrait of the Roman Emperor and declaring the emperor to be the son of the divine.

I have been to the British museum where both of my children did an admirable job of looking interested and excited whilst stood in a room full of old coins. I have seen a denarius exactly like the one Jesus held in his hand that day, a coin with the inscription on it that proclaim Tiberius as lord. A coin was made 2,000 years ago - some lies last a long time.

Jesus is being clever. A coin with the image of an idol on it like this one was technically against the Torah for a Jew to carry. Jesus asks these very devout Pharisees who give him a coin that they shouldn't be carrying.

The punch line to this episode is pretty well known, so much so that there is a grave danger that we miss the point of it.

'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'

It sounds like an answer. But Jesus, when asked a question, didn't usually give an answer, he normally asked another question - and this is what he does here. Give to the emperor that which belongs to the emperor and give to God what belongs to God. Imagine Jesus looking up questioningly at the Pharisees gathered around him: 'What do you think belongs to God?'

I don't know my Hebrew Scriptures - the Old Testament - as well as the Pharisees around Jesus did, but even I know Psalm 24:

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it  
The world, and all who live in it.

Fast forward 2,000 years, and although none of us would have the audacity to try and trap Jesus with a question as the Pharisees did, Jesus is asking us the same question that that he asked those Pharisees: *'In your life, what belongs to God?'*

We might think immediately, 'Everything.' And this is good and right. When we are at work ploughing through the admin; when we really want put our feet up and read a good book/watch 'Great British Bake Off', but instead we give our time to our partner/children/ grandchildren; when we are at school and we decide not to join in and persecute our supply teacher: all of these are ordinary things, but in the midst of the ordinary we find that the ordinary belongs to God. A sacrificial act becomes a prayer, a daily chore becomes worship, *because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.*

A hugely significant consequence of that is that all of us are called to be ministers of God. Not all of us can or should stand at the front of a church building and do it - *but there are many times when we are standing out even if we are not standing at the front.* And that is good because each of us are part of God's plan of salvation.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it: that includes you - Praise God! So now we can live our lives as if we belong to the King of kings. Amen.

Harry Steele

#### PRAYERS

*For the prayers today you may want to hold a penny in your hand as you pray.*

On the coin there will be a portrait of HRH Queen Elizabeth II. Pray for all leaders and rulers.

Your coin is round: pray for the effect of Covid-19 around the world.

There may be a portcullis on the coin (on the coat of arms): pray for those in spiritual and physical jails.

Not every has money: pray for those who are in need.

*Or you can use this more traditional format of intercessions:*

Almighty and loving God,  
Great and wonderful, true and faithful,  
We come before you with thanksgiving,  
To proclaim praise  
And celebrate your unfailing love and mercy  
In the midst of uncertainty.

We bring you our worship,  
As a token of our gratitude and expression of our faith;  
As a way of acknowledging your goodness and guidance,  
and your presence with us at all times.

Loving God, today we want to dedicate ourselves again to your service,  
To reaffirm our loyalty to Christ and his Church,  
And especially our own church family  
Whether we are worshipping together in person, online,  
Or in our own homes.

Speak to us today, we pray,  
So that, familiar though our words may be,  
They may stir and challenge our hearts.

Be present among us at this time,  
So that we catch a new sense of your purpose,  
And a new vision of the future you would lead us to. Amen

Inspired by 'Prayer for All Seasons', Nick Fawcett, published by Kevin Mayhew, p.207

### A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS

God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope; in their darkness, be their light; through him who suffered alone on the cross, but reigns with you in glory, Jesus Christ our Lord. **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.  
And 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