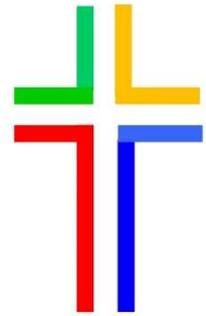


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 18 October



Welcome to today's worship sheet. Thank you for the feedback from so many that you find it helpful. We intend to continue it as a regular part of our mission. If you know of anyone who would be interested in receiving a copy, please let us know. We would be delighted to distribute more

PRAYER

Gracious and Holy God, we are Your people and we have come to worship You, to give You the glory that You deserve. Help us from the very beginning to bring open hearts and minds as well so that we may take in all that You want to say. May we give You our full attention for you deserve nothing less. In Jesus' name we pray. **The Lord's Prayer.**

READING FOR TODAY Matthew 22:15-22 (NIVUK)

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 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.

REFLECTION

The Pharisees' plot was simple – to get Jesus to commit himself on the issue of paying taxes to the heathen occupying power, Rome. If he declared himself in favour of paying taxes, then the Pharisees could renounce him as a collaborator with the conquerors: if he said that taxes should be withheld, then they could have him denounced to the Roman authorities as a dangerous nationalist who was encouraging revolt. Whether Jesus said yes or no he was trapped, or so the Pharisees thought.

Jesus argument is simple and in accord with the thought of his times. The coinage which bore a ruler's head was regarded as the personal property of the ruler. Since current Israelite coinage bore Caesar's head, it was Caesar's property to do with as he liked. Taxes should be paid. Their payment does not conflict with allegiance to God. But then comes the sting – not only must taxes be paid to Caesar, but what was owed to God must also be rendered to him.

When interpreting the Gospels, we cannot take a passage on its own, but must always set it in its context. In Matthew, this incident follows on the parable of the great feast told to illustrate how the Jews having refused God's invitation were themselves rejected in favour of the Gentiles. So, the confrontation about taxes is a deliberate attempt by the Pharisees at revenge on a dangerous rabbi who was undermining Jewish religion.

What does all this add up to for us this today? First Jesus was asked and answers an awkward question. From time to time we will be asked such questions and as Christians should be prepared to give an honest answer. Above all we must avoid the slick and the cliché. A legitimate answer can be 'I don't know'.

Second, the question which the Pharisees put to Jesus was directly political. Jesus's answer has often been used to justify separating politics and faith. But faith is not a department of life but embraces all life. Jesus is not afraid to give his opinion on a pressing political issue of his day. So, must we.

Third, Jesus answer is in a sense mysterious. He does not say it is always right to pay taxes: he says now it is right because at this moment no conflict with one's duties towards God ensues. At any given moment in history the individual must decide whether he can still render to Caesar what is his due, or whether by so doing he acts contrary to God's will.

Finally, it is easy enough to pay earthly taxes, but it is not so easy to give God his dues. God does not send us a tax bill but leaves it to our consciences to determine what is required of us. Instead of a bill, he sends his Son to embrace us. Then he tells us to take up our cross and follow. That is his demand. It is not easy. The costs are sometimes high, but the rewards are great.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

If you would like to, find and hold a coin.

Now, as we hold this coin, we will use it to help us in our prayers. Let us pray.

First, let us look at the picture on the coin.

Lord, we pray for those who are in powerful positions in our land. We pray for the Queen whose head we see now. We pray also for those in government who decide what taxes will be, and how the money will be spent. We pray too for those in local government. Give them wisdom, and a spirit of justice.

Now we look at our coin again and imagine how we would feel if this was our very last coin. We pray for those who have very little money; for those who have a family to provide for and do not know how to pay their bills; for those whose jobs are at risk; for those who live on the street. Show them how to find a way forward and help them to put their trust in You.

Now let us look at this coin, remembering that in a moment, it will go back into our pocket or purse. How will we spend it? Lord, we thank You that we have enough so that we can live. Guide us in our spending, so that we may use our money wisely and well, and in this, as in every other part of our lives, may You have the glory. Lord, the world belongs to You, show us how to please You by the way we live. **Amen**

The writer of this much-loved song, Stuart Townend, wrote this: *"I never set out to write a new musical version of this psalm – it seems very brave, or very arrogant, to think you can improve on the existing hymn version, which has been loved and sung by*

millions of people for so long! I was actually working on a different song at the time, which after several hours' hard work was not going well... I happened to flick to this psalm in my Bible while taking a break, a simple melody popped into my head, and the whole thing was written in ten minutes (something I wish as a writer would happen more often to me!).

HYMN STF 481

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know

BLESSING

Lord, as we go out into this noisy world, where so many things clamour for our attention, Help us to remember that always and everywhere, we are Your people; and may the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.