

**Sunday 18th October 2020**

**Polbeth Harwood linked with West Kirk of Calder**

**Worship led by**

**Rev Alison Quilter**

**Reading: Matthew 22: 15 – 22**

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### **Prayer for the Offering**

***Jesus said: 'Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's.' All we have and all we are has come from God, so let us worship him with our offerings.***

Lord, we thank you for Your faithfulness. We thank you that we can always trust in You.

You are an abundant God and out of Your great mercy you have given us so much.

We give you our offering today and with it we worship You and give our whole selves to You. Accept our gifts and use them for Your kingdom and Your glory.

Extend and multiply its reach and influence we pray. May it be a great blessing to many.

We ask all this in the powerful name of Jesus.

### **Prayers for the People**

***Let us remember before God the world and its people.***

God of power and might, your broken world cries out from the depths, a world dominated by the darkness of war, violence, inequality, injustice, poverty, pain, suffering and hopelessness. May the people who suffer see your light, feel your strength and power and know the truth of your promise that they shall not be

overcome by the dark shadows of life or the darkness of human nature. May world leaders and local community leaders seek your wisdom in all they do to ease the pain and suffering of the people for whom they are responsible.

God of compassion and grace, we share with you our love and concern for people in a dark place today. We have on our hearts the friends and loved ones of the victims of violence and hatred.

We pray that they will find your strength in the compassion and love of those around them.

God of life, we ask for your healing power on those who are enduring pain and illness – and we name quietly in our hearts those for whom we have concern.....

We share the grief of people close to us, who've recently lost loved ones. We know your everlasting light shines with us, in moments of great sadness and great joy.

Within our darkest night, **Let your light shine.**

Make us a welcoming body of Christ so when people think about Church they think about the real church, the people of God who worship here. Give us the presence to be witnesses in the world: Witnesses that strengthen the presence of Christ in our communities. We ask that in all we do, we may we walk more closely with you at our side safe in the knowledge that your fatherly love and care knows no bounds.

Merciful father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

*In Chapter 21 and 22 of Matthew's gospel, representatives from a number of Jewish leadership groups come to Jesus with questions. The question in Matthew 22:17 is brought by disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, an unlikely pairing of partisans, the Herodians represent the interests of Herod and other clients of Rome within his circle. Yet representatives of both groups come in order to "trap" Jesus by providing him with a lose/lose situation. But first they smooth the way by speaking of Jesus' integrity, commitment to truth and equity, and lack of concern for the opinions of others (22:16). Their question is short and to the point: Let's hear what it is?*

## **Matthew Chapter 22, verses 15-22**

### **The Question about Paying Taxes**

<sup>15</sup> The Pharisees went off and made a plan to trap Jesus with questions. <sup>16</sup> Then they sent to him some of their disciples and some members of Herod's party. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you tell the truth. You teach the truth about God's will for people, without worrying about what others think, because you pay no attention to anyone's status. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what do you think? Is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, or not?"

<sup>18</sup> Jesus, however, was aware of their evil plan, and so he said, "You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin for paying the tax!"

They brought him the coin, <sup>20</sup> and he asked them, "Whose face and name are these?"

<sup>21</sup> "The Emperor's," they answered. So Jesus said to them, "Well, then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay to God what belongs to God."

<sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

## SERMON

If October has 31 days and April has 30 days, which month has 28 days? *If you think the answer's February – then you're wrong!* Every month has 28 days. It is of course a trick question.

Today's gospel reading starts off by telling us that the Pharisees had plotted a trap for Jesus. They devised a trick question, to which they thought there was no answer that wouldn't result in Jesus getting himself into trouble. **Is it lawful to pay taxes?**

Now, taxes are a difficult subject at any time and nobody particularly likes them – unless you happen to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer!

But it seems a fairly straightforward question – given the fact that it's against the law not to pay tax.

But this question is as much about religious law as it is civil law.

If you were a faithful Jew living at the time of Jesus, the tax in question was a poll tax. It was an annual payment to the occupying Roman forces, which meant that it was hugely **unpopular** with the Jewish people.

Roman taxation had sparked off a revolt two decades earlier by Judas of Galilee which had been violently crushed by Rome. To make matters worse the tax had to be paid in Roman coins, which featured an image of Tiberius the Roman Emperor on them.

One side of the coin would have **deified** Tiberius as a "son of the divine Augustus." The other side would have honoured him as the "Pontifex Maximus" or "chief priest" of Roman polytheism. *(The Greeks and Romans were polytheistic – they believed*

*the gods and goddess ruled the heavens, the earth and the underworld and one religion seen as a threat was Christianity.)*

Both sides of the coin would have been highly offensive to the Jewish faith – claiming Caesar as divine and as Chief Priest of all the Roman Gods.

Roman coins were not allowed into the temple – and those who came to worship had to exchange the roman coins for temple coins, which didn't have any graven images on them at all.

So if Jesus says that it is right to pay taxes to Caesar then it looks as if he's supporting the Romans and everything that they stand for – which would totally discredit himself with the people who were oppressed by the power of Rome.

**But** if Jesus says that it's not right to pay taxes then his opponents are in a powerful position to report him to the Romans as a dangerous revolutionary and he would then no doubt be arrested and crucified for treason or sedition.

It seems that whichever way Jesus answer's he's going to end up in some very hot water!

But Jesus knew what they were up to and asked them for a coin suitable for paying the tax: a roman coin; the only kind that was legal tender.

"Whose image and title is upon it?" he asked. The Emperor's!" they replied.

**Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's."**

Jesus avoided the trap and slipped out of their grasp by saying – by all means pay your dues to the state, nothing more and nothing less – but also make sure you give to God the things that are God's.

Now this story is more than just Jesus showing us how clever he was because his answer raises a far more reaching question: *What are the things that belong to God?*

The coin was stamped with the emperor's image and inscription - just as our coins and notes bear the image of the Queen.

But where do we find God's image and inscription? Where can God's imprint be found?

For some people, everywhere you look in the cosmos, God's fingerprints appear in the beauty and complexity of life and in the intricate system of physical laws, which govern its movement.

But that's not the same thing as God's image? In fact scripture tells us that the only thing made in God's image is **us**.

Jesus' question reminds us that we belong to God - that God's image that has been stamped on us and its God's inscription that we bear.

But what does that mean? First, it means that each of us has the capacity for a relationship with God.

Being created in God's image doesn't mean that we all look like God, or that at our very best God looks like us.

The biblical writers weren't biologists - but theologians. The divine image is about relationship and purpose. In other words, we have within us the capacity to know, love, serve, and interact with God.

Secondly, if we are stamped with God's image and inscription, then we are coins of God's realm. We are God's currency! We are part of God's economic plan for the whole of humanity.

We are the means through which God establishes order, justice, compassion, care, beauty, truth, and goodness in human relationships. We are the means through which God is at work preserving, restoring, and nurturing life. *We do it by giving from who we are and what we have.*

We do it by investing ourselves into God's economy and producing good rates of interest for everyone.

A couple were having a lazy Sunday afternoon in front of the TV and decided that they would just order pizza instead of cooking that evening.

When the delivery man rang the doorbell, the husband answered the door. That'll be £18.37, said the delivery man.

The husband reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He looked in, and then stopped short in puzzled surprise at the solitary £5 note he had in it.

Turning his head, he called to his wife. "Honey" he said, "can you pay for the pizza? I don't seem to have enough money on me." His wife came to the door with her purse, paid the delivery man and took the pizza.

As the couple walked through to the kitchen, the man looked at his wallet again. “That’s strange” he murmured, “I was sure I had a twenty pound note on me – because I remember looking in my wallet before church this morning and I had a £5 and a £20”

“Ah”, he said, as the penny dropped “I meant to put the £5 into the collection plate this morning, but I must have put the £20 in by mistake!” His wife said. “That’s a shame, dear. But if you only meant to put in £5 then I’m sure God will only give you credit for £5!”

The credit crunch of 2008, which still is impacting on our economy today, and compounded by the Covid pandemic, has made us all think differently about the money we have and the things we spend it on – but we are still rich beyond the dreams of billions of others in our world, who have to fight for survival from disease, thirst, and hunger, every day.

Whatever we can give in terms of our time, our talents, and our money in support of God’s economy will be transformed into making our world a better place.

As a church we ask people to give not to increase our shares, or top up our investment portfolio – but to help make our world a better place by feeding the hungry, comforting those who mourn, welcoming the lonely, and so much more.

As God’s currency what we do and what we give is transformed into gifts beyond price – gifts of love, and dignity, and comfort.

But remember that we are made in God’s image, and in giving to God’s economy we are giving to all God’s people – ourselves included!



Jesus calls us to pay to God what God is due – we can't ever hope to put a price on that, but we can all strive to pay our dues to God in whatever ways we can and in the knowledge that God will take and transform all that we give into far more value than any financial investor in the world.

Amen.

#### **(CH4) 449 REJOICE THE LORD IS KING– Tune Darwall's 148th**

Rejoice the Lord is King!  
Your Lord and King adore!  
Rejoice, give thanks and sing,  
and triumph evermore.  
***Lift up your heart! lift up your voice!***  
***Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!***

Jesus the Saviour reigns,  
the God of truth and love:  
when he purged our stains,  
he took his seat above:  
***Lift up your heart! lift up your voice!***  
***Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!***

His kingdom cannot fail;  
he rules o'er earth and heaven;  
the keys of death and hell  
are to our Jesus given.  
***Lift up your heart! lift up your voice!***  
***Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!***

He sits at God's right hand  
till all his foes submit,  
and bow to his command,  
and fall before his feet:  
***Lift up your heart! lift up your voice!***  
***Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!***

Rejoice in glorious hope!  
Jesus the Judge shall come  
and take his servants up  
to their eternal home:  
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice,  
the trump of God shall sound:  
***Lift up your heart! lift up your voice!***  
***Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!***

