

Podcast
18th October 2020
Matthew 22:15-22

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to the New Kilpatrick Parish Church weekly podcast. I am Jeanette Peel, the probationary minister, at New Kilpatrick.



Worship on a Sunday morning is available in the church but even if you cannot get to the building or watch what is happening online, this worship podcast is here every week. Church is still meeting you wherever you are. So, thank you for joining us.

Our text today comes from Matthew's gospel – a test to trap Jesus into saying or doing, something that will get him in to trouble either with the community or the Roman Empire. The Pharisees and Herodians, two distinct and different factions, are plotting together to overcome Jesus. And what better way to do it but call Caesar, the head of the Roman Empire, into question?

But, as always, it is much more than that and we have to look closely and listen attentively to hear what is happening. Is it really about choices between one or the other or is there something much deeper at work in what Jesus says? And maybe we are also left wondering at the end of it where our decisions and loyalties take us? What direction should we be taking? Is it as simple as either or...?

We are still looking at creation this week and will be throughout October. We may wonder how that fits in with today's reading, but you would be surprised. So welcome on our journey this morning, wherever you are and whoever you may be with.

Centering Prayer

In Isaiah 45: 1-7 we find the following words

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him— and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things.

God of love and light and creation, going before us as he calls us by name.

Let us pray.

Creator God,

We gather this morning in the familiarity of where we are. In the familiarity that this place breathes into us, for however long we are here. And with each day we meet a new story, the sun never quite shines the same way twice, the light flickers through the windows to remind us we are in your presence.

And each time we gather whether on our own or with others, you call us and wait for us, while we quieten ourselves to hear you, to listen to you, and to follow. You call each of us by name, gathered in your love and understanding and forgiveness. Gathered in and remembered, no-one is left out, no-one is left thinking, what about me?

We give you thanks that we can do so, safely and openly, without worry for what might happen if we are discovered. We can profess our faith without stigma, persecution, or prejudice and we are grateful.

Open our hearts and minds to your wisdom, to your message speaking directly to us today. And give us the courage to step out with faith and grace and love to do your will in the community around us. Not just today, or tomorrow but at all times.

And as part of that community of faith hear us now as we say the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who is in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory for ever. Amen



Story Introduction: Matthew 22:15-22

I wonder how many times Jesus is put to the test. If we were to look at all the gospel stories and picked out the situations deemed to trip him up or win an argument, there will be more than a handful. You may think of some off the top of your head before having to delve into the actual texts.

In our text today, two groups, who did not get along, the Pharisees and the Herodians, have joined forces in an attempt to trip Jesus up. To find a way to be rid of him once and for all. As far as they are concerned, he has overstepped the mark and is now a danger to their way

of life. By this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has already made a triumphant return to Jerusalem, has cleansed the Temple in a shocking scene and is upsetting the religious authorities left, right and centre. They need a way to get rid of him and think they have finally found it. With one question. 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' Either a yes or no is going to condemn Jesus. Either the people will turn against Jesus or the Roman establishment will. Regardless what option Jesus chooses, the Pharisees and Herodians will have won. But, as always, Jesus is already one step ahead. He is not taken in by their initial flattery and his answer is not what they expected, and they are amazed not victorious. Let us listen to the reading in full now.

Reading – Matthew 22:15-22

Then 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

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." There are some phrases in the bible that people just seem to know, and this comes up as one of them. It would make a good Family Fortune's question with Gino D'Acampo! I wonder what our top verses would be.

We have met the Pharisees, many times before in Jesus' stories and parables but especially so in the run up to today's reading. Jesus directs many accusations of hypocrisy in their direction without actually naming them, but they know who he is getting at. But the Herodians? This is the first time they have appeared. They were part of the Herodian family whose political allegiance was indirectly linked to Rome and therefore Caesar. So, this unlikely collaboration has come together with one intent – to remove Jesus so they can continue living the way they always have. Jesus is causing them trouble.

Things are no different in our time. Those who speak out against governments, oppression, injustice, dictatorship, are often silenced – jailed, mocked, persecuted, and much worse. There are plenty of examples in the news just now.

So, this question, 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' is a test to put Jesus in a similar situation. To say 'no' would go against the Roman authority but to say yes without qualification might seem too compliant *with* the Roman authority. It really feels as if Jesus is in a lose-lose situation.

As we know, the Jews lived by a strict religious code and the denarius was a Roman coin used to pay taxes to Caesar. It was a coin that strict Jews found objectionable because it depicted the head of Caesar and bore the words 'son of god.'

The Decalogue, of course, forbade the making of images and together with this inscription, this coin, the denarius, contravened the Jewish laws. However, it had to be used to pay the Roman tax. The Jews also had their own special copper coins without these features for everyday living, so they did not have to carry the roman coin with them.

Now, the fact that the group have a coin readily available to give to Jesus when he asks for one is therefore quite telling. They are already using Caesar's money. And as Jesus tells them, they should therefore give it back to Caesar as it belongs to him. Settling the debt. But Jesus moves on to say 'give to God the things that are God's' which put things into a wider perspective. Pay and settle your debt to Caesar but all else belongs to God, your unrestricted due – your full self in service to God. It is not a division of secular and sacred, but a recognition that the secular finds its proper place within the sacred.

Once again, Jesus turns an entrapment situation on its head. Instead of ending up causing controversy among the community or roman establishment, Jesus manages to amaze the group, thus rendering their trap useless.

But where does that leave us in our world context today? When we are working in any area of life, we need to consider how we act and interact with governing authorities and yet maintain our faith identity especially in the face of adversity. What someone may be asked to do can go against their conscience of faith. How do they then respond? For some, this may be easy. Their government policies and their conscience may line up pretty closely. Others may find this more and more difficult as government continues to be at odds with their conscience.

With the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, as Trump's Supreme Court nominee, there is already much debate about where her loyalties will lie – her judicial or faith head – and which will win if cases go to the Supreme Court.

And there are many people who would be eager to have their heads engraved on coins or bank notes, empire-hungry people who talk as if they have God at the heart of who they are and what they do, yet we see corruption, injustice, greed, ruling over every area of their life. You cannot claim that God has all authority and then act as if *you* actually have it all or *should* have it all. That is hypocrisy at its best - or its worst.

Too many times, we, in ministry also get it wrong, we do not stand up or speak out and take action against those very people who propose to have God at the centre but it is their own greed and ambition that is their ultimate authority. We need to stand beside, or even in front of, the oppressed, the poor, the humiliated, rather than being concerned about what people might think of us or who we might upset in case they stop supporting the institution. At the forefront of anything and everything we do, must be God.

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

Prayer

During our time of prayer, there will be a period of silence, for your own prayers to God. Let us pray.

Creator God,

When the checks and balances are being done, it is often the most vulnerable who appear to come out at the bottom. The ones who do not have the power or voice or money to stand up and speak out. We, as the church have a moral and faith duty, to do just that on their behalf. To be their voice when they cannot be heard.

As schools prepare to go back after their short holiday, may we find space for those who are anxious, fearful for what is happening but have no choice. May we remember all the school staff and pupils as they go into another busy term, a term still full of uncertainty, and constant changes. Loving God, may we be your open arms and listening ears for them at this difficult time.

As those in government continually make decisions that will affect our everyday, may we hope they are made with integrity, openness, and fairness. As people worry about jobs and money and how they will get by, may we, as a church of Christ continue to respond with love and generosity.

For the anxious, the lonely, the hungry, the ill, the poor, we remember them and hold them, offering where we can our time to help heal. For the bereaved we offer our prayers and hold them in our hearts, supporting when we can, and ready for when needed.

And now as we move into silence with the prayers of those we know and love, let us also remember those in the wider community who have no one offering a prayer for them. Hear us now in the silence.

Loving God, help transform our thoughts and prayers into action so we can be the living prayer that others need. Amen

Benediction

As we leave this space and time, may we keep God at the centre of our very being our very self as we continue to serve him. And may the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon us and with all those we love, today, tomorrow and for evermore. Amen

Announcements

New Kilpatrick's Sunday worship is available online through YouTube, as a podcast, and by attending the church service – please phone the church office to book a pew by the Friday morning and Catherine will phone you back to confirm your place.

During October, the church is exploring the theme of Creation and has got involved in some practical ideas to help both the Community at home and overseas. Each week, the church is collecting donations of food, toiletries, etc. that will be distributed to the local foodbanks. Monetary online donations can also be made through the website. Each week the request will be for a different type of item and this week it is toiletries and cleaning products such as bubble bath, shampoo, and cleaning products for the home. Please drop your donations off at the New Halls between 11.00am and 12noon on Friday.

We hope the online shop will be up and running very soon too. There you can purchase the above items online and the church will send them directly to the organisations we are supporting.



New Kilpatrick Parish Church
Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Faith

Because Christian Aid missed out on many of its fundraising activities you can also donate to Christian Aid to support their activities both at home and overseas. Please go to the church website or <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/> to make a donation. Every penny or item counts towards helping someone else in need.

A special thank you to Ruth Gettinby, who shared in our time together to make this podcast.

However, for me, this is my last Sunday with New Kilpatrick Church as my probation comes to an end and I take up an NHS chaplaincy post early in November.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to everyone for welcoming me in and being there in the ups and downs that this year has brought. This year may not have turned out as any of us intended but it has been a joy and blessing to be here with you, so thank you.

I wish you all my very best wishes and blessings for the future ahead, whether you pop in and listen to the podcast occasionally, or you are here every week, a member of New Kilpatrick or not, and from whatever corner of the globe you are listening from. Thank you.

I may not be here next week but the podcast will be, so why not come along and join in and see where it takes you. In person and on here.