

Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 25 October 2020

Materials for Worship



Introduction

During our Sunday services we are looking at some of Jesus' parables. Each of these stories tells us something about God's kingdom or reign of love. And each of these stories contains a challenge for those who hear it as well as an invitation to live differently today in accordance with God's purposes for creation. This week our parable is more of a riddle than a story.

Praise CH4 149 Let all creation dance

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Let all creation dance
In energies sublime,
As order turns with chance,
Unfolding space and time;
For nature's art
In glory grows
And newly shows
God's mind and heart.</p> | <p>A fragile whole
And from its soul
Heaven's music plays.</p> |
| <p>2. Our own amazing earth,
With sunlight, cloud and storms,
And life's abundant growth
In lovely shapes and forms
Is made for praise</p> | <p>3. Lift heart and soul and voice:
In Christ all praises meet,
And nature shall rejoice
As all is made complete.
In hope be strong,
All life befriend,
And kindly tend creation's song.</p> |

Prayer of Approach

Lord's Prayer (You might like to unmute yourself for this and remute afterwards)

The Word of God: St Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 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. 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

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes". Those cheerful(!) words were written by Benjamin Franklin in a letter to a friend. And I will come back to them later. First though, I want to draw your attention to another saying concerning taxes – this time the one we heard earlier from the bible.

'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' Less of a parable this week – more of a riddle. What did Jesus mean when he said, *'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'*

Ever since they were first spoken, people have wondered what Jesus meant by these words. Some have argued that this text means we must separate faith and politics, religion and state. Others have gone even further and turned faith into a private affair – something that is purely personal. But was this what Jesus really intended?

When he uttered these words, Jesus was between a rock and a hard place. The Bible talks of two different groups of people, the Herodians, who were supporters of King Herod, and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time. These two groups were normally arch enemies. But they had one thing in common. They both saw Jesus as a threat to their own security. And so they conspired together to create a trap for Jesus. Their bait was the controversial tax demanded by Rome. The Herodians were in favour of paying the tax. To the Pharisees on the other hand, the tax was an affront to the Jewish law. And it was not just the tax but the method of payment stipulated. This tax had to be paid using a coin that bore the image of the Roman Emperor with the words "son of god" engraved around it. This was nothing less than a claim to divinity and as far as the Pharisees were concerned it amounted to idolatry or blasphemy.

United in their desire to get the better of Jesus, the Herodians and the Pharisees approach Jesus together, and they ask him, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"* Any direct answer by Jesus is bound to please one and displease the other. But Jesus doesn't give a direct answer. Instead he replies with an answer that sends his opponents away marvelling at his brilliance.

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

And those words started hours of debate in the market-place and synagogues, debate that has continued for 2000 years. But was it just a clever answer? I'm sure there was more to it than that. I believe that Jesus was issuing a challenge to his listeners.

Let me explain why. Jesus as well as being the Son of God was a human being. He was born into a Jewish family. He was no stranger to synagogue and Temple. As a young child he would have heard time and again the stories of his ancestors. He would have been brought up on the exploits of Noah and Abraham and Moses and Ruth and all the

other heroes of the Jewish faith. By the time he was an adult Jesus would have been familiar with most of the Scriptures which form our Old Testament. And central to the Old Testament is the belief that there is one God. The Jewish people believed that there was one God and that God alone was to be worshipped. For the devout Jew, the living God was Lord of all life.

To recognise that God is Lord is to view things from a different perspective. When Jesus responds to the Herodians and the pharisees he is effectively inviting his listeners to look at the world through the eyes of faith and see that greater reality of God's love which encompasses the whole of life. And when we begin to see life from this perspective it becomes impossible to distinguish between the secular and sacred. Both are inextricably intertwined and the whole of life is lived out within the sphere of God's love. From the affairs of rulers and governments to the daily, grinding, hand- to- mouth existence of the migrant – nothing is outwith the scope of God's love. There is if you like another reality behind all things and that reality is the love of God. God's love renders the secular sacred and reminds us that all that is the emperor's belongs also to God.

But how do we square this with the world as we know it? We live in a hugely complex world. In some respects that world is a broken world where injustice pervades our structures and our hierarchies. And there are times when despite our best efforts, each one of us is complicit in this injustice. So often we feel helpless to do anything about that. For me the hymnwriter Brian Wren sums up this situation in the hymn Great God your love has called us here. There he writes of how we come to God in worship

*“Half-free, half-bound by inner chains
By social forces swept along
By powers and systems close confined*

But the hymnwriter also reminds us that in the very act of coming to God in this way, we are
“seeking hope for humankind”.

For two thousand years the Church has wrestled with the uncertainty of living in the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. Followers of Jesus have struggled with the dilemma of how to balance our responsibilities to God and to the emperor. Sometimes we have been right. Sometimes we have been wrong. But one thing we can say. Not long after the Pharisees and the Herodians posed their question about taxes, the emperor demanded the death of God's Son on a cross. Now an empty tomb stands as witness that there is something else, beyond even death and taxes, that is certain in this world. And that is the power of love, God's love.

The world we live in may be a broken place, with its conflicts and poverty and in justice. But the world is also God's creation. It is the reality into which God in Christ enters. It is the place where God's Spirit is at work. There may be a gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. But it is into this gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be that we are called to live as followers of Christ. It is here in this amazing world, broken, yet brimming with potential that God's people are called to bear the image of Christ, however flawed.

And so even in the midst of the dilemma we are drawn back once again to confess our faith in the God whose love has drawn us here today and who will continue always to seek our primary allegiance.

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

What will you make of those words of Jesus?

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Those who have lost a loved one for other reasons during the pandemic
- The NHS as Covid-19 numbers rise
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers
- University students and staff
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the increased restrictions
- Our friends at Udney Pitmedden as they prepare for the induction on Thursday of their new minister Rev Gert Janse van Rensburg

Praise CH4 694 Brother, sister let me serve you

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Blessing

Notices

Next Sunday 9.45am Joint Worship (Service commences 10.00am)

If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your land-line please contact:

Rob e-mail sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail sembichard@aol.com.

Wednesday Worship Tarves Church 2.00pm a short act of worship in the Church.

Tuesday 27 October 7.00pm on Zoom Tarves Kirk Session

Thursday 29 October Community Bible Experience 4.00pm on when we will be discussing discoveries we make on reading Jeremiah 25-52.

Wednesday 4 November 7.30pm on Zoom Barthol Chapel Board and Session

Alpha On-line An invitation from our friends in Methlick to anyone who would like to join them. This will run on a Wednesday evening 7.30pm-8.45pm commencing 4th November. To register please contact Jeannie Price **Email:** jp222@btinternet.com or Tel 07764221414 before 30 October.

Care in the Community if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel please contact James Hepburn 806611.

Pastoral Care If you would like to speak to the minister please contact Alison 851295.