

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

All Saints Sunday is November 1. We plan on that Sunday to lift up the names of members and loved ones of the congregation who have passed from this life into their eternal home in 2019 and 2020. So that we will not miss anyone, please notify the church office no later than October 28 and provide their full name and month & year of death if known.

We are looking for a leader/mentor for our middle/high school level youth group. We are seeking a person committed to the Lord who is enthusiastic and has a passion for working with young people. This is a part time position. If interested, please contact the church office.

The Deacons still need a few cakes and pies, and a few people to help cook chili for the community dinner this Saturday, Oct. 24. If you can help, or to reserve a meal, please contact the church office 724-932-2101. Proceeds from the chili dinner will go to the Deacons Fund which helps people in need for rent, utilities and food.

October Sunday Duties:

Close-Up: Bud Owen
Counting the Offering: Tom Walker

Deacon for October: Linda Kappelt - If you know of anyone in the hospital or in need of assistance please contact Linda @ 814-573-6889

Organist today: Cindy Loveridge
Worship Leader today: Gladys Melton

Happy Birthday!

10/29 Shirley Bonam



JAMESTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs
Psalm 100: 1-2a*

October 18, 2020

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP HIM

Prelude

Welcome and Sharing News of the Kingdom

To prepare our hearts and minds for worship, let us take a few moments in silent prayer.

Call to Worship

One: Praise the Lord, O my soul! Rejoice and praise his wonderful name!

All: Clap your hands, all you people, and shout to God with songs of joy.

One: Blessed are they whose hope is in the Lord,

All: His love endures forever and his promises never fail. Come, let us worship the Lord!

Jamestown Presbyterian Church
October 18, 2020

Pastor Sue Nageotte

“The Other Side of the Coin”

Matthew 22: 15-22

Our sermon text this morning describes one of several encounters between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in the days leading up to his arrest and crucifixion. Let us hear now the Word of God as it comes to us in Matthew 22, vs 15-22:

[read the passage] This is the Word of the Lord; **thanks be to God.**

There are some key things to notice about this encounter. To begin with, Luke tells us that this was a set-up -- an attempt by Jesus' adversaries to catch him saying something they could use against him.

It is interesting that the Pharisees sent some of their disciples along with the Herodians. The thing is, those two groups had little in common. Unlike the Pharisees, Herodians were not particularly devout. They were more like a political party. It was extremely important to them that King Herod remain in power. They didn't care that he was a wicked tyrant. The fact that he married his own brother's wife ... the fact that he had imprisoned and executed John the Baptist ... the fact that he was a murderer many times over ... all of this was common knowledge, but the Herodians supported him anyway.

Normally, the Pharisees and Herodians wanted nothing to do with each other. They had different goals, different ideals. In fact, they despised one another -- but they were willing to work together at least this one time, if it meant they could get rid of that troublesome young rabbi named Jesus.

The plan they decided on was simple. In public, in the temple courtyard where everyone could hear, first they would butter him up, get him off guard ... then they'd ask him to rule on a very controversial topic: whether or not it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. Taxes were nothing new in Israel. Even back to the time of King Saul, most people paid taxes (look carefully at the story of David and Goliath and you'll see what I mean). And for centuries, Jewish people had paid a small yearly tax used to maintain the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Most people didn't mind the temple tax; in fact, they liked knowing that their annual payment helped keep the Temple looking beautiful.

But there was a new tax imposed by Rome, called the “head tax,” that everyone in the region was forced to pay. Faithful Jews *hated* the head tax, not just because it was money out of their pockets but because of everything the tax represented. Worse still, the head tax had to be paid in *Roman* coins.

Now, some of you might be wondering “Why does this matter?” Truth is, most people in

the empire didn't care. But it mattered to Jews – it mattered a lot. It was an especially touchy issue for *Pharisees* because every single coin minted by the Roman government bore the printed image of Caesar, together with an inscription naming him as a divine being. Those two things – the image, and the motto -- directly violated the Lord's commandments: "You shall have no other gods besides me" and "You shall make no graven images."

That's why they thought they found the perfect way to trap Jesus. One of the beauties of their question was, it required a "yes or no" answer. If Jesus said YES it was right for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar – using Roman coin – the crowds would think he was taking sides with Rome, in which case they would turn against him. But if Jesus said, "NO, it isn't right to pay taxes to Caesar," then the *Herodians* could have him arrested, claiming he was inciting a rebellion against the government.

Jesus, knowing their intentions, simply asked them to show him the coin used for paying the tax. "Whose picture is this?" he asked, "and whose name is written here?" They must have thought he'd lost his mind. Obviously, that was *Caesar's* image and *Caesar's* name. "So then," he said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's ... but give to God, what belongs to God." What could they say to that? Nothing. Not a single word. So they left him alone and went away. The Pharisees and Herodians *thought* they had Jesus in a corner. But Jesus saw through their false compliments, past the trap, and got right down to the deeper question. It isn't about money, or taxes, or government policies.

The deeper question -- the issue at the "heart" of things -- is about our essential identity.

To whom do we belong? To whom do we owe honor, respect and obedience?

"Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar," says Jesus. We do have certain obligations as citizens of this earth, and government is to be respected. It is appropriate for us to pay our taxes, take our turn at jury duty, serve in the armed forces when called upon to do so, and vote as prayerfully and intelligently as we can.

That is "Caesar's side" of the coin – our civil responsibilities.

"But," Jesus says, at the SAME TIME -- "Give to God what belongs to God." The word he used actually means, "give back to." That's the other side of the coin: that we give back to God, what belongs to God.

And what belongs to God? We might as well as what does NOT belong to God! "The earth is the Lord's, and all that is within it." -- and for that matter, every corner of the vastness of space, all belongs to God. We depend upon him for *everything*.

As Christians, you and I and the rest of Christ's church – well, we belong to God in a very special way. Our lives have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. All who have heard and respond to God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ – by grace, through

faith – are adopted into God’s family. Through Christ, God receives us as fully-forgiven, dearly-loved children.

Until the day that Christ returns – or calls us home to heaven -- we continue to “owe” certain obligations to earthly government and earthly institutions. But we must never forget that these earthly powers are merely temporary. We also live in the Kingdom of Heaven, and what really matters is how we live IN Christ, WITH Christ, FOR Christ.

So how do we begin to DO that? How do we give our lives back to God, so that we spend our life rightly, as citizens of heaven? What would that look like? Well, let me first tell you what it would NOT look like! A man named Wilbur Rees wrote the following poem – fictional, I hope – from the perspective of someone who wants just a LITTLE bit of God. Here is the poem:

“I would like to buy three dollars’ worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep;
just enough to equal a warm cup of milk or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don’t want enough of God to make me love a homeless drunkard
or pick beets with a migrant. I’m after ecstasy, not transformation.
I want the warmth of the womb, not new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy three dollars’ worth of God, please.”

There are people who approach their faith in that way. They want just a LITTLE bit of God ... enough to feel “better” about life, but not enough to change their priorities or their accustomed way of doing things. But ... is that how God desires us to live? As half-hearted, lukewarm disciples? No, most assuredly not!

Scripture tells us that God is not pleased with half-hearted commitment. God wants us to love him with our whole hearts – to love him, and to give our best back to him.

So my question today is, what would that look like? What would it look like if we were to give our best to God? It’s going to be a little different for each one of us, depending upon what God is calling us to do, and how God is calling us to grow.

But you can be absolutely sure of this: God calls every follower of Christ to take an active part in accomplishing his kingdom purposes. God promises to bless his faithful people, not for our sake alone but so that we may be a blessing to others.

[Describe a few examples]

- Ruth and Marv, the older couple I mentioned last week who took a rambunctious toddler under their wing and into their hearts;

- Retired couple who mentored older teens who were “aging out” of foster care;
- An elder named Autumn in Greenville – some of you knew her – whose body was frail but her mind was sharp. She led Bible studies and even served on session when she was more than 90 years old
- Furnace repair-man named Ken, who often made “no fee” follow-up calls to the seniors in his community just to make sure they were getting along all right

Each one, giving their lives back to God; each one, being enriched and fulfilled and deeply blessed in the process of giving.

Let me end with an observation. “Church” is not a place we go; it is not an hour-long weekly event. “Church” is what we are. Church is a community, a God-guided life together in which all have an essential part. But without each person being actively, whole-heartedly involved, this congregation will never become all that God desires us to be. Each person has their own unique but very vital role to play. God may from time to time call each of us to a season of rest and renewal, but God does not want ANY of us to become stagnant. And church was never intended to be a spectator sport, where 95 percent of the people watch and 5 percent of the congregation serves.

So I ask you again: what would it look like, right here at JPC, if each and every one of us were to give our best back to God? Think about that, this week. Better still ... talk to God about what part he wants YOU to take. And let’s not be content with three dollars’ worth of God. Because HE wants us to have much, much more.

Let us pray ... Amen.