

***October 18, 2020***



We have chosen to follow Jesus' commandment to care for our neighbor, especially our most vulnerable neighbors (Matthew 22: 37-40), during the coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic. While we are not gathering at the church building, we have chosen to see this as a time for us to try new ways to worship, learn, pray, and stay connected ...after all, *God is always doing new things (Isaiah 43:1-19)!*

In these difficult times, we are committed to continuing to find ways to be the church.

Don't hesitate to be in touch if you need something, especially help...getting groceries or medicine, figuring out how to do all this online stuff, or just needing to chat. We are here to help!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Henry, the Elders, and Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Corona

*In order to open the music, place the cursor on the title, press ctrl and click. That will take you to the appropriate YouTube location to open.*

GATHERING SONG                    [I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come to worship Jesus Christ, Alpha and Omega, the One who is, who was, and is to come. Come to worship Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth! Come to worship Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords!

HYMN                                    [Rejoice, the Lord is King](#)

PRAYER

Almighty God, we raise our hearts to thee in praise and thanks. For we are not ourselves, and nothing is ours except what thou hast given us. We are finite; we do not bring anything into our world; we shall not take anything out of our world. Thou hast given us the life which is ours, so long as it is thy will. We thank thee that we have being, that we share in the inexhaustible riches of life, in the smallest and in the largest part of it. We give thanks to thee when joy fills our hearts.

(Theologian/teacher/pastor Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now)

HYMN                                    [Lift High the Cross](#)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that far too often we do not want a savior who is a king. We would prefer Jesus to be subject to us, rather than the other way around. We are not keen for a redeemer who has any claims on us and certainly not one who makes demands of us. We have our own plans and agendas. We are happy for Jesus to rubber stamp them for us, but a savior who is a king to whom we owe allegiance and obedience? No thanks. Forgive our foolishness, O God! Forgive our arrogance and selfishness. We know that everything we have and everything we are is a gift from you, but we are forgetful, rebellious and stubborn. Thank you for not giving up on us. We ask for forgiveness and restoration, not because of anything we have or have not done, but only for the sake of Christ the King. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Through the crucified body and blood of Christ the King, we have been given a pardon from God. "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, proclaiming Jesus as Lord of all. Amen.

SCRIPTURE Matthew 22:15-22 NRSV

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They 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." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

## SERMON

Verse 16 is the only reference to the Herodians in Matthew. One assumption is that they supported Herod Antipas, one of the sons of King Herod the Great. Following his father's death in 4 B.C., Herod Antipas received a portion of his father's kingdom and was declared Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, ruling these territories from 4 B.C. until his own death in 39 A.D. (His full brother, Herod Archelaus, Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea from 4 B.C. to 6 A.D., was a vicious ruler, which prompted Joseph, Mary and Jesus to settle in Galilee when they returned from Egypt [2:22]).

Matthew nonetheless carefully depicts the test between the religious leaders' representatives and Jesus. On meeting him, they say, "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." It's clear their greeting is disingenuous, cloaked in fawned praise and hypocrisy. If pressed, they would likely admit that they doubt his provenance, they disapprove of his teaching, and they detest him because he undermines their authority. Moreover, they think he plays favorites, preferring the company of filthy tax collectors and prostitutes over them, the religious elite.

Following their insincere salutation, they waste no time and turn to their primary mission, asking, "Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Their query is designed to corner Jesus in a no-win scenario; the either-or structure expects a "Yes" or "No" answer. On one hand, if Jesus replies with the affirmative, then he will undermine the support he receives from the people who loathe the tax burden imposed on them by the Roman Empire. On the other hand, if he responds with the negative, then the religious leaders can hand him over to the Roman authorities, accusing him of sedition based on the testimony of many witnesses.

However, neither happens. On the contrary, Jesus, well "aware of their 'evil intention'," reveals their true intent, declaring, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?" Although the Greek is appropriately translated as a question, Jesus' retort is a verdict rather than a query. Simply put, this is an instance when a question isn't really a question at all.

After exposing their real aim, Jesus then directs the disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians to show him "the coin used for the tax." In Roman-occupied territories a periodic head tax was typically levied during a census whenever the Roman procurator over Judea needed additional funds. The coin, a denarius, typically had an image of the emperor's head and an inscription referencing the emperor's official title.

Once the Pharisees' disciples fetch a denarius, Jesus answers, in authentic rabbinic style, their question with a question: "Whose head is this, and whose title?" (v. 20). Looking at the evidence before them, and perhaps still holding the coin in their hands, they answer, "The emperor's" With Solomonic wisdom Jesus replies, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (v. 21b). Matthew then records, "When they heard this, *they were amazed; and they left him and went away*"

Audrey West shares this modern depiction of the encounter. At first, they sound like big-money lobbyists seeking to influence a congressional committee chair, offering slavish praise of their target's character. Beneath the flattery we might imagine closed captioning that reveals their unspoken thoughts:

Teacher, we know that you are sincere

*[To be honest we think you are full of it],*

*and you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth*

*[we might call it fake news],*

*and show deference to no one*

*[by the way, why don't you defer more readily to our authority?].*

*for you do not regard people with partiality*

*[of course, everybody knows some people are inherently better than others].*

They press on and ask: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?

Of course, their coalition party would not agree on the proper answer to their own question. As agents of Rome, the Herodians favor the tax and may well be lining their own pockets before the revenue gets shipped out of the province. The Pharisees, however, like other Jewish people of their day, resent the tax as well as the idolatrous image of Caesar that was struck into the face of the coins required to pay it.

If Jesus supports the tax, the Pharisees can accuse him of disloyalty to God. If he opposes the tax, the Herodians can charge him with sedition or, at the very least, ensure that his name appears on the first-century equivalent of an FBI watchlist.

Always one to speak in images—typically in the form of parables, but this time taking advantage of a visual aid—Jesus asks about the coin. Then he refuses their framing and offers a different picture, suggesting that God's values are not the same as the world's values. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

His statement ends the debate, while leaving an unspoken question hanging in the air. Will we worship the one whose image is stamped on a coin (or on a building, or banner, or campaign poster)? Or will we worship the one who is the very image of God-with-us?

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan say that when Jesus asks the disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians to produce a coin, and they produce a Roman coin with an image of the Caesar on it, they show how guilty they are. Carrying around an image of a pagan god in their pocket, they are guilty of idolatry.

At this point in the encounter, Jesus has won. They have self-identified as part of the pagan-religious-state. They have broken the first and second commandments.

Jesus could just walk away, victorious. But he does not. He has more. He raises the question: What then belongs to Caesar, and what belongs to God?

We cannot understand Jesus without knowing that every silver coin in the world he lived in said that Caesar was the Son of God.

If we reframe the question just a bit, the clear answer appears. If we gave to Zeus the things that belonged to Zeus, and to God the things that are God's, what would WE end up giving to Zeus?

Hopefully nothing. He is a sham. A non-existent entity, with no more divine power than the average tsetse fly.

And, what belongs to God, then? Everything.

In the words of King Solomon and echoed in many of our churches every week: "All things come of thee, O God, and of thine own do we give to thee."

Obviously then, this is not a call for separation of state and religion. This is not the establishment of a dual responsibility to God and country. This is a call to give all that we have and all that we are to God. Both our religious and civic lives could use a little more of that these days.

Jesus is essentially saying this: "Yes, there are earthly matters of obedience that are not fun and may not even seem right -- like paying taxes. And there are faith matters of obedience and allegiance to God that demand our attention and require our devotion. But they are not necessarily at odds. Do not use one as an excuse to avoid the other. I am not going to be a convenient escape for earthly things you hate doing. Do both."

Key voices in the Protestant reformation, like Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon, used these words as a critical building block in what would become known as the doctrine of two governments or of two kingdoms. There is the spiritual kingdom where God rules with the gospel, feeding his church with forgiveness and changing her heart by his Spirit. Then there is the realm of the secular which includes every human institution and structure -- such as government, work, and family -- and through which external matters are dealt with.

The point for the reformers was that both realms, both kingdoms, belonged to God. Both were tools of his using to bring about his purposes. In one realm he provided the structures for survival, and in the other he provided the means of grace and for membership in his eternal family. But they were, they *are*, both his.

Therefore, it was illegitimate -- except in case of extreme contradiction of Christian conscience -- for Christians to play the "Jesus-card" to avoid stuff they do not like. Why? Because Jesus is ruling the secular, external world, too -- albeit in a different way. So do not opt out of taxes on the grounds that you tithe. Give your tithe and find a legitimate way to deal with your taxes. Through one, God is glorified in an act of spiritual worship. In the other, God is glorified in an act of good citizenship. He is the ruler of, and we are citizens of, both realms.

Jesus isn't here to take sides on our agenda or to be a useful pawn as we craft our own way of living in this world -- picking and choosing the parts of secular life we like and the spiritual parts of life we're keen to embrace. He is not here to enable an à la carte approach to living where we are only faithful in the things we desire to be and rebel against those which we don't like.

Jesus came to craft a people -- through his life, death and resurrection -- who believe that he is Lord over all things and who, as a result, pursue obedience and beauty in every aspect of life. And yes, at rare times that pursuit will drive us to reject the current secular system, but even then it will drive us to build another one where we'll be called to ask the same old questions: "What is required of me in this relationship? What does faithfulness look like as a citizen? What does love look like in this particular responsibility that I do not like?" We are to be a people who ask those questions even though we know the answers may be uncomfortable.

Why do we do this? Because we know this world -- all parts of it -- do not belong to us or to Caesar. They belong to God. We seek not to co-opt God as we craft our own world but honor God within both realms.

## AFFIRMATION

In life and death, we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve. We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

## Joys & Concerns

Teri—Colbie is doing well and on track with her weight gain now; Alice Reille is out of the convalescent home and at her daughter's home. She celebrated her 93rd birthday last month

### ***Continuing Prayers***

Continued prayers for Rochelle. Prayers for our country and elected ones. All people, law enforcement & civilians, affected by current violence in this country. Lynn Rodisch - healing. Pete - healing. Kofi - prayer. Loren Nelson - continued prayer.

*Please Pray During Week of October 18, 2020 for the families of:*

- ◆ Jean Marsh
- ◆ Don McNeil



if you have a prayer request or joy to share, contact any session member, Pastor Henry, the prayer chain at [mom4tc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mom4tc@sbcglobal.net), or [judy@fpc-corona.org](mailto:judy@fpc-corona.org).

During this time of being apart,  
remember that your Deacons are  
available if you are in need of help.

## PRAYER

You have made us for yourself, O God, and called us to be a covenant people -- a people set apart. We are set apart not for privilege but for service, not for special rights but for responsibility. Our loyalty is to you and your kingdom. Our values and priorities, our pursuits and passions are to reflect your heart -- a heart of love for the poor, a heart of justice for the maligned, a heart of compassion for the broken. Transform us, merciful Savior, in those places where we are still attracted to the culture's agenda of power, money, beauty and influence. Save us from serving unworthy gods, from chasing after fleeting affections, from investing our days in the temporary rather than the eternal. Thank you for the call to be yours and for the grace to live that call. Thank you for the prayer the Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

## HYMN

[Called as Partners in Christ's Service](#)

## BENEDICTION

May the words of praise you have been singing resound in your hearts and echo in your lives so that each person you meet will know of Christ our King! Amen.

## RESPONSE

[We are the World](#)