

Tingley Methodist Church
Service of worship for Sunday 18th October

Call to worship: Psalm 96: 4-6.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised
He is to be revered above all gods
For all the gods of the peoples are idols
But the Lord made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him.
Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Hymn: [Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise](#)

Prayers

Prayer of approach

Loving God, you know each of us by name and day by day we discover your favour afresh.

Your love is new every morning and your presence remains with us, whether we are called to travel or need to stay put.

You are our rest-giver and the source of our peace. We marvel that you choose to be gracious to us. We are touched and humbled by the mercy You extend.

We ask you to stir our hearts and teach us your ways so that we who belong to you may know more of you.

Show us your glory Lord and open our eyes to it, so that we and all your people may worship you in spirit and in truth.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God.

We have sinned against you in word, in thought, and in deed.

And in the things that we have failed to do.

We have not loved you with our whole heart,

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry, and we turn away from what is wrong.

Forgive us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Receive the assurance of forgiveness.

For Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his gracious word.

‘Your sins are forgiven.

Amen

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ

You have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you.

Give us the will to be servants of others as you were the servant of all.

For you gave up your life and died for us, but live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

One God, now and for ever.

Amen

Hymn: [From heaven you came helpless babe](#)

Bible Reading: [Matthew 22: 15-22](#)

The Question about Paying Taxes

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

When the Pharisees and the Herodians asked Jesus about paying the imperial tax, Jesus replied "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

I'm reminded of a story about a Methodist Minister who said to the congregation at the end of a service, "I'll be here again in 4 weeks time, and I'll be preaching from the Gospel of Mark, in particular chapter 17 and verses 6-11. It would be helpful if you made yourself familiar with the text in advance of the service". 4 weeks later when he returned, he reminded the congregation of this and asked for a show of hands, so he had an idea of how many people had read the passage. A few hands were tentatively raised, as were the ministers eyebrows.

Marks gospel of course doesn't have a seventeenth chapter, this had been a trick question, a question designed to catch people out.

And in much the same way, Jesus knew that the question about paying taxes was designed to trap him, to catch him out. But Matthew's Gospel records that the answer he gave, 'amazed' those who asked him the question. "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." What I hope we can do this morning is to think about what Jesus meant when he said this, but more importantly I want us to think about what it means to us today, more than 2000 years later and in the face of a global pandemic.

Now of course, one of the significant features in our reading today is that the Pharisees and the Herodians seemed to be working together – collaborating – to catch Jesus out.

We know that the Pharisees were a religious group – probably resented the secular rule of Rome and the Herodians were a political party – pro-emperor. They would have had quite different views on the payment of taxes.

And normally, these two groups were at odds with one another. For them to have come together in a common cause was amazing and would have required the cause to be an extremely high priority for them both.

If Jesus said they ought to pay their taxes to the Emperor, the Pharisees could have accused Him of yielding to the rule of Rome..... and what kind of Messiah would do that?

But on the other hand, if He said no to paying tax to the Emperor, the Herodians could have accused Him of going against the Roman rule.

That meant that whether Jesus answered 'yes' or 'no', he would lose the respect of either one group or the other. But Jesus went much deeper into the issue and gave the most amazing, out of the box, out of this world, and yet simple, answer. His answer was obvious yet at the same time elusive.

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

In answering in this way Jesus brilliantly demonstrated the profound truth that people have responsibilities towards their countries whose benefits they share, but that they also have a responsibility to God.

So, responsibilities towards our country – and let's be honest that's not the first thing we think about when we pay our income tax is it? – when I look at the pay slip my employer sends me at the end of every month, and in particular when I look at the column headed "*deductions*" – the thing that doesn't spring to mind is that I'm helping my country out.

Yet we all have payments to make and obligations to meet. It's just that sometimes it feels like we live in a generation in which people feel that they don't owe anything to anybody. A society, where the bottom line to every choice people make seems to be "but will it make **me** happy?"

Jesus reminds us that as citizens we have responsibilities, not just to pay taxes, but to obey the law, to play by the rules, to toe the line.

But then he hits us with the second part of the answer – “and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus makes it clear here that we have a responsibility towards God - we owe God something, and we need to make sure we give it to Him.

If paying tax is compulsory and our responsibility to our country important, how can we lower that standard when it comes to serving God? Our sense of duty towards serving God in His Kingdom ought to be much higher don’t you think? If tax evasion is a serious offence, then how can evading God be considered anything less?

Of course, we are living through unprecedented times – I’m sure that you, like I, had plans for 2020 – and mine certainly didn’t include me staying indoors most of the time, keeping two metres apart from people, wearing a face-covering and not singing hymns in Church – that said one could argue that they are all things that other people may actually be quite grateful for.

But what I want to do, is to suggest three things that we all can do to show our gratitude to God – three ways to ‘give to God the things that are God’s’.

The first is TRUST – and some people might say that’s not so easy at the moment.

Yet, the Bible, one of our main building blocks of faith, provides plenty of examples of God’s people in crisis, and how they developed deeper trust in trying times. Yes, maybe they were written in another time and another place, but they still speak to us at this time, and in this place.

A pandemic cannot and does not make God’s promises null and void. COVID-19 has not erased the assurance of God’s eternal Word. The coronavirus need not cause a crisis of confidence in God’s ability to solve our problems and provide for our needs. It can lead us to deeper faith, to greater trust, and to more secure confidence in God. Amid our greatest challenges, God’s promises are still there. We must trust God.

The second thing is TIME – how much time do we give to God – and do we give enough. I haven’t been in a particularly good place emotionally this last few weeks and months – and I came here on Wednesday evening needing and hoping that God would speak to me. And He did – remember last weeks reading from Philippians, chapter 4 verses 6 and 7, – “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”.

Prayer – it can change us, and it can also change situations. Perhaps we should all ask ourselves..... are we are giving enough time to God in prayer.

But then there’s also giving time to God through our lives – through our actions and through our kindness – one of the things that has struck me throughout COVID has been the willingness of ordinary people, people like you and I, who are taking the time to give people a ring, to pick up a bit of shopping, to collect medicines, and a whole host of other things. I’m sure you can think of many examples. We must make and give time to God – in prayer and in service.

And the third thing I'm suggesting we can give to God is our talents. God has called each of us to service and He has indeed blessed us with a variety of skills and talents.

Being a Christian isn't a spectator sport is it. Despite the fact that grace is a gift freely given – indeed given without condition, I reckon that God expects each of us to get involved in the life of the church and its' ministries. He has called us. He has gifted us. He has given us abilities to be used in His service. And it's up to each of us to understand and to use those abilities to serve God and to serve our fellow citizens – following the COVID guidance of course – remember I did say earlier we have a responsibility to obey the law and follow the rules. But perhaps we can all have a good think, what gifts and what talents do we have that we could use in these difficult times to serve God by serving others.

Trust — Time – Talent three things we can give to God.

Of course, what we know is that we have a debt to God that can never be repaid in full. The question here isn't about paying in full, the question and it isn't a trick one is are **we** giving enough.

Amen.

Hymn: [Take this moment, sign and space](#)

Prayers of intercession and Lord's Prayer

Lord of hope and freedom, we sing to you a new song in praises and prayers. May we respect authority where it is righteous and true, but give our allegiance in spiritual matters to you. Guide our rulers in your ways and let those who feel their beliefs are compromised seek to discern your will for them through the example and judgement of your Son, for whom nothing was too difficult to overcome, even death on the cross.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer**

We ask for your blessings on your Church so that through prayers and penitence we may see your true glory, know your love and patience, and see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May the worldwide Church bring new dimensions to our worship and our ways of working, so that a sharing of good practice brings us together in fellowship and extends your kingdom across national and cultural boundaries.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer**

Send us out to do the work started by Saint Paul, taking your word to highways and byways, teaching and learning along the way. Give us the confidence and courage to grow our own faith while sharing it with others. As we pray for the troubled areas of the world, we ask for your inspiration to workers and volunteers who respond to conflicts and emergencies, bringing relief and hope, in your name.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer**

We remember the sick and the lonely, the disabled and the housebound, asking that you bring comfort and relief from pain. Let those who provide care, paid or unpaid, show the love that comes naturally to you, patient Lord.

We give thanks for the lives of the recently departed. Let hope spring eternal as mourners grieve and friends extend a hand of comfort and consolation.

Lord, in your mercy. ***Hear our Prayer***

And in the silence of this moment, we bring our own person prayers to God.

Lord, in your mercy. ***Hear our Prayer***

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us when we pray to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

For ever and ever.

Amen

Blessing

May God our Father inspire and strengthen us in our work of faith.

May Christ Jesus our brother, motivate and sustain us in our labour of love

May the Spirit our helper, establish and build in us a steadfast hope.

That our living may be a reason for thanksgiving and may bring Glory to God.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ.

Amen