

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 22:15–22 15Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his talk.

16And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” 18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” 22When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

In the Name of Jesus.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new son; sing to the LORD, all the earth!

The NEW song that David urges all nations and peoples to sing is the Gospel! David sang—and DANCED, BESIDE HIMSELF!—when they brought up the ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The ark was that one certain place that a poor man, under the threat of death from the Law of Moses, could meet the Living God, David’s Lord—meet Him and yet live! Not only live! But then sing with lungs and mouth to bursting, so that every field was FILLED with that exultation! So that all the trees of the forest would echo what little David’s heart could not contain!

That threatening LAW, my dear ones, was INSIDE the ark of the Covenant! WRAPPED UP—we may say—in a container where the Living God could come, once a year, to open the lid and check with the contract and see if the His people had earned from Him life, or death. But before the lid was opened, the LORD Himself had appointed that a lamb would be killed and its blood poured on the lid; so there was no need for the LORD to bother himself any longer with justice and righteousness. It was all over. The

living being had died.

No wonder David sang, and danced! And appointed priests to bang cymbals and the blow horns and beat drums as they processed with the Ark to the City. The Chronicler says—so sweetly, so simply: ‘And the LORD helped them do all this!’ And He sang the Psalm appointed today for OUR song and dance about the LORD—once and for good!—wrapping up what HE expects of US—NOT in some wooden box, scary, deadly, untouchable; but in Mary’s Boy. Touchable—yes. Crucifiable; mortal; baptize-able; one of us, though not like us at all!

In a word: NEW! Worth a song, a psalm; a life lived and danced and sung so that these walls echo, and the parking lot, and our homes and the ears of our loved ones AND OUR ENEMIES—that now, NOW, since the Christ, NEW David, David’s Son and David’s LORD has risen from the dead Calvary stained—the GOD we know as little about or less than ANYTHING at all in God’s Creation—
He...is...not...going...to...deal...with...us, with
anyone...according...to...what...we...deserve!

Christians ‘CELEBRATE’ the Lord’s Passover, His Body and His Blood, dear disciples. For how can we hold it in, back? The God we MUST admit to being ignorant of and CONTRARY TO has placed Himself at OUR service, Divine Service! Without any regard to how WE serve HIM!

(Cue the dim lights and sad music!)

‘Tell us, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’ They said to ‘entangle Jesus in his talk.’ THIS is what you get—not NEW! No! The same OLD same OLD—Law and death and interrogation and suspicion and accusation and one-ups-man-ship and loading the barrel with ammo to accuse and spread the word that WE HOLY PEOPLE have PINNED DOWN the GUILTY, THE GUILTY, THE GUILTY!

(No, your pastor is not worked up about this.)

This is what you get when the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. The 'entanglement' was going to work like this:

Get Jesus to side with the Romans—yes, pay taxes—and He loses support among the crowds—WHOM, you know, the Pharisees DESPISED!

Or, get Jesus to show anti-Roman bias—well, those godless foreigners don't deserve anything—and they can turn Jesus over to Pilate. Which they all did anyway.

My dear ones, there is ZERO CHANCE that your Holy Spirit inspired this passage to give anyone—not you or me!—some 'smart answer' to 'win' some sort of argument with the Pharisees playing make-believe in Moses' sandals, like they're big boys now! NO CHANCE!

The Lord said these things to bring joy to life, to make each field and forest, nation and people—to make each poor, crushed sinner who feels the weight or REAL MOSES and his demands feel the burden lifted off!

When and where the Holy Spirit delivers His most wondrous mercy, your poor pastor thanks my dear Heavenly Father FIRST OF ALL for Christ's Sacrifice and Resurrection; the forgiveness, life and salvation of all that being DELIVERED to me the day I was baptized by Christ's authority—so that's the end of whether or not I'm a Christian or a child of God or saved or heaven-bound, or whatever.

But SECOND, I thank My Holy Spirit for His Breathing in as Deep as He has ever learned how to breathe, and then He Wind-ed out His BEST, saving it for Last, these grey and latter days. He raised up Doctor Martin Luther as the happiest and clearest of all preaching to the Church, the world,

heaven earth and hell combined! The Happy News that the Living God—our POLAR OPPOSITE, though He made us in His Image—the Living God will NOT treat us as we deserve—according to our WORKS! Instead, The Father substituted not ONLY the Son of Mary, from Nazareth as the Suffering King of God’s Kingdom—but in That Man’s Flesh dwelt All the Fullness of the Godhead—in a Word, The Father’s Second-Self, His Son.

The proof that Luther was the best thing the Spirit of Christ ever came up with is that after Luther started printing and preaching and arguing and comforting this Good News to the poor, frightened sinners in desperate need of Unexpected Consolation—Satan reared his smiling face as wide as he ever had! And he had his puppets—the popes and cardinals and worldly leaders—condemn and excommunicate Martin Luther. Why? For telling world the words we heard our Lord speak to those who would trap Him in His words—and thus crush HIM between Church and State, as they wanted Luther to be crushed. Luther simply repeated to the world what Jesus of Nazareth said to those who could not STAND to hear that ALL our works offered to God are phony as a politician’s promise! And that they MORE religious we appear in this world, the MORE Heaven needs to work to bear with us!

In short: render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s; and unto God that which is God’s!

Caesar is all about demanding works from us.

God—NOW—IN CHRIST—is all about giving us not only His gifts, but HIM!

And there’s the Gospel! The New Song! The Mystery hidden for all ages but now revealed to God’s saints in the Church, in His Word, in His Holy Gifts, by His Spirit!

HOW, my dear ones—HOW do we GIVE to GOD what WE...CAN...ONLY...RECEIVE?!

Jesus does not even TRY to out-Moses Moses! That's not why He came!

He came to fill to BURSTING the demands of Moses' Law! By never once transgressing what was demanded—but then shedding His Blood to WAVE OFF the wrath of God from each one washed WITH that Blood, baptized by His authority.

So no matter where the voice comes from, dear disciples—you don't need a smart answer to them. No; ignore 'em. Each voice: in your head and heart, or from outside—ESPECIALLY if it's from some Moses-ape religious type whose only approach to you is investigation and interrogation and weighting and judging and sifting to the finest grain.

Oh, by the way: it's the damnablest thing you and I can do too! Approach anyone—A...N...Y...O...N...E!—with our Sherlock Holmes microscope and furrowed brow and piercing eye to see how well or how poorly—(it's POORLY that we're looking for, right?!)—the next man is doing with us, and by extension, with God!

'Will we pull back, stop up love, leave prayer cold and unspoken? Or will we embrace and intercede for as little rulers of God's kingdom, little christs?'

If the PHARISEES sitting in Moses' seat brought words of disgust to the lips of our Savior, how sick do we suppose WE make Him, when we climb up on that throne with them?

Thank God that GOD comes at us the NEW way now—meaning, NOT according to the demands and threats and penalties of Moses!

We still live in a world of laws and accusations and threats. That's what Caesar is for! And, my dear ones, it is part of the cross and our burden and the confession of our sinful state that there's not much better to do in this world than to bow our necks to the yoke of our lords and masters, our betters, and give the world what the world wants and those who love the world. They want the world! Give 'em the world!

But God asks us to GIVE Him what can only be HIS gift to us!

What can WE give HIM? What does God the Father want?

He wants His Son! The NEW David, NEW Christ, NEW Captain of the Kingdom that's NEW!

So, if our day gets rolling and thriving based on HIS guarantees to US—our Baptism, His Holy Supper, His Absolution, His Prayer to make God our Father—the next poor man, BRACING for interrogation and a TRAP—gets from us what GOD GIVES to us.

Pardon, peace, intercession, joy, a song and a dance that teaches the whole world something the world can never learn, but for David and his faith!

The God we CANNOT KNOW, has made Himself FULLY KNOWN in His Son! And now, in His Church, where He does nothing but pardon and forgive and grant heavenly peace in Jesus' Name. Amen!