

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Papa Owusu. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

Welcome to our act of worship this morning on the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

Today we look at another attempt to ask Jesus a 'loaded question'. As we consider the response Jesus makes to the question of authority, we will consider what authority we ought to respond to and how we recognise the authority of God in others, as well as ourselves.

### **Call to Worship - Based on Psalm 96.2**

Sing to the Lord, bless his name;  
**tell of his salvation from day to day. Amen**

### **Hymn: Lord, I lift your name on high (Singing the Faith 332)**

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0nn8QT2-VQ>

Lord, I lift Your name on high,  
Lord, I love to sing your praises;

I'm so glad you're in my life,  
I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from Heaven to earth to show the way  
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay  
From the cross to the grave  
From the grave to the sky  
Lord, I lift Your name on high.

*Rick Founds*

### **A prayer of confession**

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God, sometimes we defile God's image by the way we live, by what we say and what we do.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God, sometimes we ignore God's image in others, and belittle them by our words and actions.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

We confess that although we are stamped with the image of God, sometimes we hide God's image from others, by pretending that we know best.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Forgive us, and renew your image stamped on us,  
that we may be more like you in living and loving. **Amen.**

### **Words of Assurance**

In Christ we are set free.  
Through Christ we are forgiven.

**Amen. Thanks be to God**

### **The Collect**

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and formed us in your own image.  
Teach us to discern your hand in all your works,  
and to serve you with reverence and thanksgiving;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who reigns, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
supreme over all creation,  
now and for ever. **Amen**

**Today's reading: Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSVA)**

### **The Question about Paying Taxes**

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' <sup>21</sup> 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.' <sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

### **Time to Reflect**

**'Give to God the things that are God's...'**

From almost the very beginning of Matthew's gospel, Jesus has been experiencing and encountering various oppositions from the religious leaders; but in spite of the growing conflict, his popularity never waned. In Matthew 21:1-17, 23-27, we have Jesus' authority being questioned by the Chief Priests and Elders as regards to the cleansing of the Temple. This encounter may

have led Jesus to pronounce the three parables against Israel's attitude – **The parable of the two sons** (Matt. 21:28-32); **the parable of the vineyard** (Matt. 21:33-36); **and the parable of the wedding feast** (Matt.22:1-15).

These three parables were followed by some challenges from the religious leaders; and in today gospel reading, Jesus is set upon from one of these quarters... Today, two groups who do not see eye to eye, attempt to entrap Jesus by questioning him about allegiance to the emperor and to God by using paying of taxes to Caesar.

These two groups were the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Herodians were a political party who derived their name as followers of King Herod. They sympathized with the Herodian rulers in their general policy of government, and in the social customs which they introduced from Rome; and they were political foes of the Pharisees who represent the religious establishment and wished to restore the kingdom of David.

Matthew Henry, a bible commentator, states that, 'there [were] two ways by which the enemies of Christ [normally] employed to take revenge or to get rid of him – **and it was either by force or by law**. They could not use the law unless they could make him to be intolerable to the civil law and as regards to the usage of force, make him obnoxious to the people. In this story none of perverse ways was used.

These two groups employed subtle strategies by putting up pretences as if they assent to Jesus' ministry... **Cf. Matt. 22:16** *'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show difference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.'* Although their assertion was true, their intentions were full of flattery and treachery.

In their pretences and their ploy to entangle him and to expose him to the fury of the people or the authority, Jesus, being the all-powerful and the all-knowing had already discovered it... Here we see Jesus meeting, head on, the challenges put to him by the political leaders in Jerusalem. In this particular discourse and other encounters, Jesus was essentially directing their attention back to God, to God's words and to God's law.

One poignant thing about this story is that we see Jesus allowing time and space for heated questions and challenges about authority and power and this took place in Jerusalem which is understood to be the seat of God's authority on earth.

He eventually answered them, but his response seemed to be carefully thought through and the response in itself was a significant challenge ***'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'*** This response made them... ***'amazed; and they left him and went away'***. He draws their attention to God's desire for

honesty, compassion and justice... and this was the case because God's image was profoundly stamped upon him (Jesus).

***How do we live our lives as people of God who have been stamped with the image of God? How do we approach arguments and discord in our lives? Do we allow time for God's word to dwell deeply in our hearts before responding? Do our words and actions direct and enrich our relationships – and amaze the people we encounter?***

As we ponder together meditatively on this gospel reading today:

- Let us be mindful of the fact that our God the son knows all about us....and nothing can be hidden from him...' cf. verse 18: 'But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?'

***What are your intentions as a Christian?***

- Let us be mindful of the fact that Christianity is not an enemy to the civil society – Christ's Kingdom is not necessarily incompatible with the larger Society; it is rather to enhance it. Christianity that does not affect by and large the bigger society is no Christianity. 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the

*emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'* (Verse 21)

***Are we fulfilling our civic responsibilities? As demonstrated by Jesus, the challenge is being able to respond honestly and with integrity to the competing demands the world makes on us...***

- Let us be mindful of the fact that all that we are and all that we have are God's.

***What is it that we have that belongs to God? What is God's that we are withholding from him? Are we using the gifts of God wisely? Are we bearing the fruit of the Spirit?***

If we are to stop the pretences as it were with the two groups (the Pharisees and the Herodians) and commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the ways of the Lord... As He (God) said to Moses, in Exodus 33:12-23:

- '[His] presence will go with [us], and [he] will give [us] rest.
- [We] will find favour in [his] sight, because he knows us by our names... He has chosen you and I for his special purpose; and he will do the very things we ask him...

- God's nature and character will never elude us - His goodness, graciousness and mercy will pass before us; we will definitely be granted glimpses of God's glory as it was shown to Moses when he interceded for the people of Israel in Exodus 33:21-23.

What are we giving to God? This is about our everyday lives; and about the choices we make and the priorities we have. Let us give ourselves enough time to think about these things; and let us remember that we are stamped with the image of God – and as we are made in this way, God is invariably ready to help and guide us, even when we encounter challenging and difficult times in our daily lives and relationships with one another... all that is needed is to give to God the things of God. **Amen**

#### **A time of prayer (trusting that others pray with us)**

Loving God, we thank you for all who respond to your call to work as a result of their faith. We pray for those who are inspired to work in countries other than their own, and we call to mind the agencies they may work for: Christian Aid, Tear Fund, the Leprosy Mission... Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for those whose labour is prompted by love of you and of their neighbours. We pray for those who work in health care, those who look after people in residential care, those who support their families... Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks for those whose endurance is inspired by their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for those who struggle through poverty or injustice, for those who are persecuted for their faith, who have been tortured and imprisoned... Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

Let us pray the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught his disciples and 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.**

**Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

**Hymn: At the name of Jesus (Singing the Faith 317)**

*Read/Pray/Proclaim the words (Verses 1, 2, and 5)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI2rKRCWmOU>

At the name of Jesus  
every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him  
King of Glory now.  
'Tis the Father's pleasure  
we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning  
was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season,  
to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners  
unto whom he came,  
faithfully he bore it  
spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious  
when from death he passed:

For this same Lord Jesus  
shall return again,  
with his Father's glory,  
with his angel train;  
for all wreaths of empire  
meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him  
King of Glory now.

*Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)*

**Blessing**

Go, sing to the Lord, tell of his goodness.  
Go, worship God through your actions;  
Go into the world and work for Christ and know that he is  
always with you.  
Keep alert. Stand firm in your faith and let all that you do be  
done in love. **Amen**

The blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

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