



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 2017

*The Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of
the world!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 22, 15-22:

- **ESV 15** Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His talk.
- **16** And 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.
- **17** Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Cæsar, or not?"
- **18** But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"
- **19** Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.
- **20** And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"
- **21** They said, "Cæsar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."
- **22** When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will receive the wisdom of God so that we will see God at work even through the kingdoms of the earth.*

Amen.

• **Dear Beloved of God!**

- Give to the government what belongs to it and to God the things that are God's, Jesus said. The messengers, sent by the Pharisees, were amazed. That means, they would have expected something else from Jesus. They would have thought He would speak out against the Cæsar. Give all to God and nothing to Herod- that is what they expected to hear. But now, the delegation from Herod had nothing offensive to report. In fact Jesus was clearly teaching that even His disciples should pay taxes. Taxes belong to the government.
- They were amazed because they thought that Jesus would be strictly against anything coming from Herod's side. Herod killed John the Baptist. So, they reasoned that Jesus would basically hate king Herod for doing such a thing and would oppose him in every possible way. But, Jesus, let us remember who He is, the Head of the church, does strike out at Herod. He submits Himself under the government of the day, in this regard, and confirms that even the church should pay tax!
- The big question is this, has Jesus switched sides by doing this? Does this mean

that the murder of John the Baptist is approved of, or accepted by Jesus? Did Jesus give honour to a murderer? Not in a million years! By no means! Never!

• But that is exactly how the Herodians and the messengers of the Pharisees reasoned, that is how our old nature reasons. Either we are on the black and white path, or else everything is relative. Everything goes, if its not black and white.

• Here we see once again, how far our thoughts, our reasoning, our wisdom is away from God's ways.

• Christ and, with Him His church, will pay tax to the Caesar, the government although Christ has His own kingdom. So, here we have the quite astonishing thing, that one kingdom pays tax to the other kingdom, willingly! In other words, we can say that Christ and His Body the Church, in one sense, is a citizen of the earthly kingdoms. And a good citizen too, because the church is willing to pay tax without corruption, without trying to hide or steal from the government.

• The reason behind it all is, that a king or a democratically elected government, hold the office instituted by God, for law and order, so that we can have an ordered and peaceful life. To accomplish this, the government needs money, needs taxes.

• And by the way, we see here, that it is not so that only if a Christian governs shall we pay our taxes. No. Even a king Herod, who murdered one of God's prophets, receives tax money from Christ. So, we have to see that Christ honours the office and the with the office comes the function of the office. That is what Jesus honours, and we should honour the office of the president too. Now, of course the question arises, what if king Herod abuses his office? In such a case we as Christ's Body should speak out against such a government, as happened in the past, with the atrocities of the previous government and as is happening at present with regard to the corruptions of the state capture.

• However, we should not follow the path of making the country ungovernable, by disrupting order in society. That is not the way of Christ. No disruptive revolution can do it in the name of Christ! If we have spoken out, voted against the government or king, which is corrupt, all to no avail, then there is only one way to go according to Christ: Christ's Body will rather go into suffering than starting a physical war or organise an unruly mob which will turn society into chaos. Every bit of good order in civil society is God's work. That is why government officials are appropriately called 'civil servants'. And the president is the first servant, if correctly understood.

• From the OT Scriptures we see how God used pagan kings to either punish His

people Israel or bless them. In the reading assigned to this day, we have heard how God used Cyrus to bind other nations, enemies of Israel, so that the Israelites could go back to their land, after the Babylonian Captivity.

•What this tells us is, that God pulls the strings! He ultimately rules over all kingdoms of the world. The fact that they in so many cases do their own thing, deceived by satan, for long periods of time, is a witness of God's patience. As Christians we should remember, that God can bring changes in governments. Its not that we only have the option of suffering, if all discussion and politics have failed. We can pray to God and ask Him to bring the change which is best for ones country. It can take 70 years, as was the case with the Israelites captured in Babylon.

•But, suffering will end sooner or later. God's kingdom does not operate with force. It consistently continues to confess the truth, to hand out the mercy of God and to teach the good will of God. It also continues to reprimand evil and exposes it in both bad and pleasant times.

•In this world, where God's Word is not the norm, we cannot expect that governments will follow the Way of Christ. We can expect to from time to time go through tough patches. What a blessing is it, to know, that our Lord is concerned about us. He is concerned about His ultimate mission. The kingdom of God came to earth to proclaim the new creation. It is a reality since Christ's ultimate sacrifice and His resurrection. In His kingdom the Word of God has full sway.

•But in the world the Word of God seems so weak. Anyone can resist it. Anyone can rip the Bible apart. Anyone can turn the message in whatever way they want to. You can abuse it to proof anything, if you want to. Its what they did with Jesus. They accused Him, and slandered Him, and finally killed Him. And Herod, Pilate- they continued their convenient lives.

•Within the suffering of Christ, His Word and His Body is its power. Christ and His Body- the kingdom of God- loves the world! The Love of God is pure Love, namely serving others, reaching out to them, although they are evil, and therefore it will easily be abused by violent old Adams. But, this does not stop them from continuing to love and serve them! God's sacrificial Love drives out fear. God's Love and true freedom go together.

•Those who abuse power are the ones caught up in their own greediness. They have to continue to abuse. They can never be weak! Its a fake existence. And they are trapped in it. They are not free to submit themselves to others, to serve

others. They are not free to suffer, for others!

• To willingly suffer for others is the highest form of freedom of the Self. That is where you reach out to another completely, without expecting anything in return. That is the Spirit of Christ, of God, the Holy Spirit. This act of reaching out to others, whilst suffering on their behalf, is powerful. Its proof of God. Its out of this world.

• Its what Jesus makes us to be. Its what the Holy Spirit shapes us to become. This is returning to the likeness of God, to the image of Himself, to Adam as God had initially created us.

• And now, let us consider for a moment what that means. Let us consider for a moment, if this image, if this likeness could be practised amongst us in the family, in the congregation, in the synod, in our communities- what would it be like? Wouldn't that be heaven on earth?! If we would outdo one another in willingness to serve and even suffer for one another! That would be freedom!

• Do you spot the deep irony here? The world cries out for peace and freedom, but they are chasing after the things which will never ever give them that. Freedom lies not in power! Freedom lies not in throwing away all laws and above all the Ten Commandments. Peace lies not in destroying everyone else, or driving them away, so that I can live in peace alone, all by myself, or going to a monastery to achieve the same.

• The freedom God gives, makes us free, to go into the world, with all its blindness, its bragging and bold evilness- to go straight in there- and switch on the light of eternity: the Love of Christ. Proclaim the Word of the Cross and share God's mercy with the world, that includes king Herod and his images.

• Let us conclude: God has not written off the world. It is still turning. He wants us to pay our taxes to the worldly governments. And Christ makes us free to give to God what belongs to Him. And that is, He points us to our neighbours in the world, to share a piece of eternity with them, the very thing we have received in the Kingdom of God, the gift of God we receive here and now in His Kingdom. Take this gift and share it with others and do not be afraid for suffering. Go, in the peace of the Lord. **Amen.**

• *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*