

## Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church



Lectionary 29, 2020

Readings Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 96:1-9;

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554, Password: 654321

Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

### **Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV)**

<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.

### **Matthew 22:15-22 (The Message)**

<sup>15</sup> That's when the Pharisees plotted a way to trap him into saying something damaging. <sup>16</sup> They sent their disciples, with a few of Herod's followers mixed in, to ask, "Teacher, we know you have integrity, teach the way of God accurately, are indifferent to popular opinion, and don't pander to your students. <sup>17</sup> So tell us honestly: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

<sup>18</sup> Jesus knew they were up to no good. He said, "Why are you playing these games with me? Why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup> Do you have a coin? Let me see it." They handed him a silver piece.

<sup>20</sup> "This engraving—who does it look like? And whose name is on it?"

<sup>21</sup> They said, "Caesar."

"Then give Caesar what is his, and give God what is his."

<sup>22</sup> The Pharisees were speechless. They went off shaking their heads.

As Jesus continues to teach and respond to critics in the Temple following his noticeable entrance into Jerusalem, we have another story of a challenge and confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders and elites. In this case, the Pharisees send their disciples, along with a few Herodians (those who supported Herod as the vassal King of the real rulers - the Romans).

1. Knowing the intent to "entrap Jesus," what do you make of their opening lines of praise for him?

The question, "Is it lawful," betrays the Pharisees attempt to put Jesus in a bind and divide those who were holding him in esteem. The question about taxes presumes knowledge that Roman law required the payment of taxes, something that was resented by most, even if deemed a necessary evil to either keep peace or avoid jail.

Yet beyond Roman law, there was the matter of Torah law which forbade having any other gods or worshipping any graven images. Could paying taxes to the self describe god Ceasar Tiberious, whose image was on the coin Jesus asked for, be justified for an observant Jew? Such was the trap the Pharisees were hoping to set as they tried to manipulate Jesus to take sides on a hot-button issue of the day.

2. *How might you have answered the question "Is it lawful"?*
3. *Do we still struggle with paying taxes when taxing authorities use them for purposes that go against our faith beliefs and values?*
4. *Do you see opposing factions today still seek to manipulate Jesus' teaching to support their desired ends?*

By asking for a coin before offering an answer, Jesus draws those seeking to trap him into the very trap they are trying to set. That such a coin was easily produced (likely by one of the Herodians) shows that all Jews in the same boat when it came to the horns of this dilemma. Not having such a coin meant running afoul of the Romans; but simply having could be considered a violation of core Torah law. It's only then that Jesus offers his response that amazes those questioning him: "Give to the Emperor the things that are the Emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

5. *Why do you think Jesus response amazed (or silenced) those trapping Jesus?*
6. *How do you interpret Jesus' response?*

We know that everything belongs to God before it belongs to anyone (including Emperors, Kings and Queens, Presidents, or any form of government). (Ps. 21:1, "The earth is the Lord's and everything within.") Yet, Jesus' answer acknowledges the government of his day while inviting people to see the bigger picture that God's rule and throne far exceed any human ruler. While Jesus doesn't offer a clear "yes" or "no" regarding taxes, he does remind the faithful of every age allegiance to any government is secondary to allegiance to God.

7. *How does your view of God and understanding of Christ's teaching direct your view of the purpose and role of government?*
8. *As a Christ follower, when and how should we advocate for or protest against governmental policies and/or requirements?*