

*Faith Lutheran Church*

*Sunday, October 18, 2020*  
*20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*



*Welcome*

*Call to Worship*

We gather together in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

*Call to Confession*

Friends, we are beloved and broken at the same time. Let us confess to God and one another the sins that have kept us apart.

*Prayer of Confession* (please join in confessing our sins)

**God of mercy, we place our trust in tangible things—things we can see and touch—and question whether You are really there. Forgive us, Holy One, when we fail to recognize that You are always nearby, patiently waiting for us to recognize Your presence and Your glory. Help us when we lose our way, and forgive us when we forget to whom we truly belong. Lover of justice, open our eyes to see You; open our ears to hear You; open our hearts to love You; and open our hands to serve You. Forgive us when we fail to do Your will.**

*Declaration of Forgiveness*

When we cry to God, looking for favor in God's sight, God answers: "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." In the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus+, we are forgiven! **Amen. We are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

*Opening Prayer*

Please join me in prayer:

**Sovereign God, raise Your throne in our hearts. Created by You, let us live in Your image; created for You, let us act for Your glory; redeemed by You, let us give You what is Yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

*Readings and Psalm*

- **Isaiah 45:1-7** *An earthly ruler as the instrument of God's will*
- **Psalm 96:1-9 [10-13]** *Ascribe to the Lord honor and power. (Ps. 96:7)*
- **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10** *Thanksgiving for the church at Thessalonica*

*The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 22:15-22*

*After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap Him with questions. First, they ask if God's people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like Caesar.*

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to You, O Christ.**

### Sermon

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Money is a powerful tool. It can be a *very* powerful tool for those who have a lot of money. Many times, we have seen those with money exert their power on others based solely on their net worth. They feel their wealth is a sign of their ability to make good decisions and, therefore, to govern or rule over others.

Having a lot of money has some tremendous perks to it. Millionaires - and billionaires - can afford to go *anyplace* they wish, purchase *anything* they dream, and not even bat an eye.

As brilliant as they may seem (based solely on their wealth), they often do not manage their own money. They have financial advisors who guide them in making decisions that hopefully increase their wealth or at least secures it. The success of the wealthy is often dependent on others.

Money isn't all it's cracked up to be. I'm sure you've heard the saying, "money doesn't buy happiness", to which I reply, "let me give it a shot!" Seriously, though, I know wealthy people who are miserable. They struggle to find friends, *true* friends, who aren't their friends *just* because they are rich. A lot of wealthy people can't go out without some sort of security detail surrounding them so their freedom is limited. They can't just get in a vehicle and drive to see the colors on a whim.

And then there are us folks. Us folks - who might have a nest egg put away for a rainy day or towards our retirement. Us folks - who might not have that much but are living within our means. Us folks - who are living paycheck to paycheck and wonder if we will *ever* be able to retire. Us folks - who struggle to meet our financial responsibilities because we have a lower-income job. Us folks - who rely on food pantries and government programs to put food on our tables. Us folks.

Jesus constantly attempts to expose the crooked and weaken the gap between *them* and *us*. Just as it was back then - it still is today.

In our gospel from Matthew 22 that we just heard, the Pharisees were again attempting to trap Jesus. The conflict between them continues to build. The boiling point is near. The Pharisees continued to collect "evidence" to kill Jesus. He is tested, tricked, and tempted, and yet, He never wavers.

Back then, there was a particular coin used for paying the Roman tax. On this coin was the image of Caesar, the Roman Emperor. This coin certainly violated the commandments to have no other Gods and the commandment to not make any images of God. So, asking Jesus if it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not - was a trap. And it wasn't the first time the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus, which brought about the parables we have heard over the past couple of weeks.

Jesus used the parable of the wedding banquet and the guest who was not wearing a wedding robe to call out those who are unprepared for the coming of the king. He used the parable of the crooked tenants who tried to steal ownership of a vineyard by killing the landowner's slaves and his son to urge the wicked to turn from their wicked ways. And when Jesus' authority was questioned, He diverted answering the question by asking the Pharisees a question, exposing their trap. Of course, Jesus' authority came from God. All things come from God. All things belong to God. Including our wealth.

Sometimes that's what we forget. We forget that everything we have, everything we own, everything we possess – our homes, vehicles, clothes, even our very lives – belongs to God. We forget that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. We forget that God is more powerful than money or man. We forget. So, we continue to listen to scripture and ponder their meaning for our lives.

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.” Jesus isn't going to be trapped again. He isn't going to be tricked or tempted. Because Jesus knows that everything the Pharisees have, everything they ever had and will ever have in the future, belongs to God.

This would be a good opportunity to talk about stewardship and examining the gifts that we have and how we use them. It would be a great time to pass out invitation cards and ask members to pledge their tithe to the church. Yet I'll save that for another time.

Because, while it would be easy to talk about money, taxes, and tithing today, I think it is about something more. I think it is about Jesus using the example of the emperor's face on a coin to ask us where *our* loyalty lies and for whom we place our value. I think it is about *us* identifying those objects or things that we may value more or that maybe take away our focus from God.

Granted, that could lead to a conversation about money if we value money more than we value God. It could lead to a conversation about possessions if we value possessions more than we value God. And it could certainly lead to a conversation about how wisely we do - or don't - use our time praising God.

So, while there are many different ways to look at today's parable, I encourage you to take a moment or two and look at what you *value*. Is your focus on making money and getting ahead in life, not caring about who you step on along the way? Is your focus on living your life however you want to with no regard for your sisters and brothers in Christ? Or is your focus on loving, protecting, and caring for one another because you know that is what God calls us to do and you want to please God and because you value God?

We are *all* created in God's image. We are formed out of dust and God's breath. We are claimed as God's own children. No one can put a price on that. That is more powerful and precious than anything in this world. That is of more value than all the money in the world. Our loyalty should be to the One who is the most powerful of all – God, our Father.

And if, by chance, you ever feel the need to question how much God values us, think of John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*” **Amen.**

### **Blessing**

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

### **Prayers of Intercession**

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Gracious God, You call us by name and invite us to share Your good news. Send Your Holy Spirit among preachers, missionaries, and evangelists. We give thanks for the witness of Your servant Luke, the evangelist, whom the church commemorates today.

God of praise, the heavens and all creation declare Your salvation. From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the whole universe show forth Your goodness. Raise up devoted stewards of all that You have made.

God of all, may Your word of justice sound forth in every place. Restore divided nations and communities with reconciling truth.

God of light, we pray for those living with pain, illness, isolation, grief, anger, or doubt. Join their voices in a new song, assuring them that You call them each by name.

God of comfort, we pray for all those who are affected by the coronavirus. We pray for those suffering in any way this day, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time.....(please name your prayer concerns).

God of truth, You show no partiality. May Your spirit guide the work of justices, magistrates, court officials, and all vocations of the law, that Your promise of restoration may be known.

Living God, as You raised Jesus from the dead, so raise up those who have died in You. We give thanks for their witness, confident of Your rescuing welcome for all.

Listen as we call on You, O God, and enfold in Your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Our Lord's Prayer**

*I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...*

**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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen**

### **Offering**

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

**Offertory Prayer** (*please join in prayer*)

**As we offer our gifts and lives in this moment, may we become imitators of You, Gracious God, who holds nothing back from us, but is generous and gracious with all that is yours. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

**Dismissal**

Go in peace, serving Christ by serving one another.

**Thanks be to God.**

Sources:

[www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org)

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