

Sunday Service 18 October Revd Pauline Crispin

As different areas experience different levels of lockdown may we appreciate God's goodness to each of us.

Inspiring God,
we pray for grace to enjoy the blessings of your world;
for discernment to know when to speak out for the values of your kingdom;
for wisdom to know when compromise is the most fruitful way;
for courage when we must make a stand.
And at all times we pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit
to guide, inspire and empower us, in Jesus' name. Amen.
Prayer of Confession

**We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.**

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven. In your mercy, Lord, forgive us.

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins. Heal and strengthen us by his spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Sing or read:

- 1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace !
- 2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.
- 3 Jesus — the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease ;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.
- 4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free ;
his blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.
- 5 He speaks ; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive ;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice ;
the humble poor believe.
- 6 See all your sins on Jesus laid :
the Lamb of God was slain ;
his soul was once an offering made
that all may heaven gain.
- 7 In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,
shall feel, your sins forgiven,
anticipate your heaven below,
and own that love is heaven.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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Jesus' parables of fathers and sons, vineyards and a wedding feast have put his critics on the defensive. Here they counter-attack with a trick question that picks up the popular resentment provoked by the controversial Roman poll tax. The Jews resented the tax because it was a constant reminder of foreign occupation in 'their own land'. Caesar's head was found on coins minted throughout the Empire, symbolising his aspiration to global sovereignty. For Jews who rejected the rule of Rome, the silver denarius was the currency of oppression.

Matthew 22:15-22

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

Reflection on the reading:

The question about paying taxes to Rome was a much-debated issue in first-century Israel. In one sense, of course, it was academic. People had no option but to pay. But it annoyed patriotic Jews, for whom payment of the imperial taxes was an acknowledgement of Roman sovereignty. There were religious as well as political dimensions to the issue, for some felt that to acknowledge the sovereignty of Rome was to infringe the sovereignty of God, Israel's only true ruler. Besides, to acknowledge the sovereignty of the empire came unpleasantly close to acknowledging the divinity of its head, Caesar. This last danger was one that Jews were reminded of every time they used a Roman coin. All Roman coins bore the head of Caesar and therefore fell foul of the Jewish law prohibiting images. And the emperor at the time of Jesus' ministry was Tiberius, the inscription on whose coins included his divine title. So, it was arguable that one could not pay taxes to Rome without breaking both the first and second commandments.

- I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods but me.
- You shall not make for yourself any idol.

All these issues are very highly specific to the time and place of first-century Israel, but they raise a much wider question, which is potentially challenging for all religious people. How do we relate our religious obligations to our duties to political authority? For most of us, for most of the time, happily there is no tension between the two, but what do we do if a conflict does arise between the two sets of duties? Jesus' answer here is helpful only up to a point. He is not sympathetic to those who want to turn the tax issue into a matter for conflict. His answer implies that the state has a legitimate realm, and that taxation is one of its valid demands. Some of the contemporary objections he subtly rejects as religious nit-picking.

Conscientious religious Jews refused to look at the image of Caesar's head. If required to use Roman coins they would distinguish them by feel, like a blind person. Jesus will have no nonsense with that sort of thing. He asks for a coin and explicitly draws attention to the image on it and the offensive inscription. His common-sense answer is that we acknowledge the realities of political power and let political authority get on with its job, but immediately adds that we should give 'to God the things that are God's'. This is the difficult bit. Jesus is implying that in his judgement there is no irreconcilable conflict between God and Caesar in the situation before him; but what happens when there is? He does not answer this question because he is not asked. It has not yet arisen.

However, it has arisen for the writer of the book of Revelation, and it has arisen for Christians in many situations since. What are your thoughts when you watch, hear or read the news at this current time? Is there a conflict in your heart between political authority and the Word of the Lord, as you believe and understand it?

Prayers for others

Lord God, in our corner of the world it isn't easy to really feel the pain of persecution for our faith, but we know that it happens. We pray for those who are persecuted and punished, violated and scarred because of their faith. We pray for those who despite these things speak out and speak up, and witness to you, the living God. We pray for the families of these people that they may be given strength and support in their own faith and discipleship. We pray for those who teach us of you, who unpack your truths, who explain what living a Christian life is and how to follow you. We pray for those who guide us in times of struggles with our faith, those who stand by us in times of denial and bewilderment. We pray for those who are dying in the faith, and those who are struggling to find their faith before they die. For these and all your witnesses, Lord, we pray. Amen.

**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.**

Sing or read:

- 1 All my hope on God is founded ;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.
- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust ;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.
- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought ;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow ;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand ;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (*alt.*)

based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

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**Into a world of confusion and disbelief,
into a world of welcome and rejection,
we take the grace of God that has been among us,
and the peace of God that has been on our hearts.
Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pauline". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured surface. A long, sweeping horizontal flourish extends from the end of the name across the width of the signature.