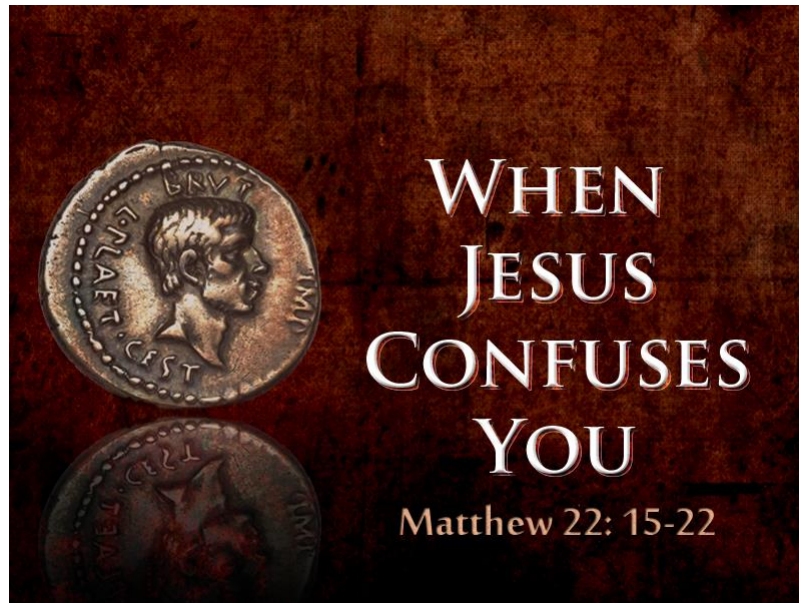


## Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020



### Acknowledgement of Country

As we enter this time of worship we acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Gamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land, and pay respect to their elders – past and present.

### Call to Worship

Heaven and earth, join to worship your Creator!  
Sing to the Lord, praise the One from whom you came.  
Sing a new song to the God who goes before us,  
making all new, leaving nobody the same.  
Heaven and earth, join to worship your Creator!  
Sing to the Lord, praise the One from whom you came.

### Prayer

God, our Creator, we come to worship you.  
During this time of worship, we pray that your Spirit will move within us:  
renewing and encouraging us in our Christian journey of faith. Amen.

### Song *God himself is present*

God himself is present, let us now adore him  
as with awe we come before him.  
God is in our midst, now in our hearts keep silence,  
worshipping in deepest reverence.  
Him we know, him we name,  
come and let us make him our renewed surrender.

O majestic Being, I would praise you duly  
and my service render to you  
in the self-same spirit as the holy angels,  
ever standing in your presence.

Grant me now so to strive  
evermore to please you, dearest God, in all things.

Let your glorious light, Lord, permeating all things,  
reach my face and eyes to touch them;  
as the tender flowers open out their petals,  
to the sun their hearts unfolding,  
so may I calm in joy, hold your rays from heaven,  
power within me working.

Lord, make me your dwelling, let my heart and spirit  
be for you an earthly temple:  
come, Immediate Being, my whole life illumine,  
so I'll always praise and love you,  
so where'er I may be there may I perceive you,  
ever bow before you.

*TiS 121 G Tersteegen, tr. H M Thwaites Copied under CCLI Worship Licence 604439*

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession**

Let us reflect on the love God has for us:

- always moving towards our need
- unconditionally accepting and gracious
- participating in our pain and grief
- releasing us towards new life
- never leaving us alone
- forgiving and re-creating

(Silence)

Forgiving God, forgive the hatred which divides  
nation from nation, race from race, class from class:

(Silence)

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own:

(Silence)

The greed which exploits the labours of men and women and lays waste the earth:

(Silence)

Our indifference to the plight of the homeless  
and the refugee:

(Silence)

The pride which so often leads us to trust in ourselves and not in you:

(Silence)

Loving, generous and forgiving God enable us, by your Spirit, to change our ways so that we  
may more fully live as followers of Jesus. Amen.

## Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear God's words of grace to you through Christ:  
'Your sins are forgiven.'

**Thanks be to God!**

### The Gospel Reading *Matthew 22:15-22*

<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.

### Message

I have a dialogue that is based on our reading for today and it finishes as follows: Peter asks Jesus: 'What if Caesar wants what belongs to God? And what if God wants what Caesar thinks is his? Jesus replies: 'I think that may be an interesting argument for a few days, or a few weeks, or a few centuries.

These are questions that have haunted the hallowed walls of churches and of houses of parliament down through the centuries.

The story we have is one of the most famous of all told about Jesus and one that is frequently misunderstood. It lends itself to being used to justify a separation of the affairs of religion and the affairs of commerce and government. For some people this story is about explaining why the church ought not to be involved in anything that has to do with politics. Religion is for the private sphere. In the same way: John 18:36 which says, 'My kingdom is not of this world' serves to bolster the view that the church is about getting to heaven and not about how things are run here.

By appealing to such interpretations, some politicians resort to telling the church to get back into its box when it starts asking difficult questions – for example, about the government's refugee policies, or their climate policies, or their economic policies.

I think Matthew would have been a bit astonished at such interpretations, for he has (prior to this story) been giving a theological commentary on social and political events which had rocked his community – namely, the sacking of Jerusalem.

In Israel, it was almost impossible to separate politics and religion because the Old Testament sanctioned national interest and national institutions, not least the temple system which was operating in Jesus' day. This was why the question put to Jesus by the Pharisees and the Herodians, made sense. It was a big issue.

Questions such as 'What do you do about Rome, the pagan power, which now controlled the promised land and, in the eyes of many, polluted it? Do you pay taxes to such a regime? And if you do, doesn't that sanction the power? In fact, one of the ploys advocated by devout rebels in Israel, was the withholding of taxes.

The Pharisees were generally experts in knowing how to apply the scriptures to everyday life so they knew that this was a highly controversial issue and so they plotted to set Jesus up in public. They knew that if Jesus answered yes, they could brand him as someone who co-

operated with the Roman invaders. If he said no, they could brand him as a revolutionary and troublemaker, and he could face charges of treason.

But Jesus was not to be caught out.

Firstly, he asked them for a coin and they responded by giving him one which, we can assume, had an imperial inscription.

After looking at it, he hands it back to them saying: ‘Give to the emperor what is the emperor’s and to God what is God’s.’

Jesus’s response didn’t advocate withholding taxes – rather give Caesar what is his due: the taxes which he demanded. This doesn’t mean that such a response is always appropriate. It is impossible to generalise like that from a single anecdote, for there will also be times when it is appropriate to throw tables over and drive out money changers.

Jesus’ quick-witted reply bristles with ambiguity in its second part: ‘and to God what is God’s’. One reading does indeed see Jesus dividing reality up; on the one hand we have a loyalty to the state; on the other hand we have a loyalty to God. But it all depends on what we mean by ‘what is God’s?’. Surely all things are God’s!

If this is the case, then Jesus’ reply was profoundly subversive. It was subversive for the hearers of his day and is subversive in our day.

If everything is God’s, then we are called to seek God’s will in everything. And that will entail measuring all things – including governments, by the vision Jesus has given us of God’s rule or kingdom.

God’s compassion knows no bounds so it will always be an irritant to regimes which stifle it and it will always stand in conflict with oppressors, whoever and wherever they are.

That is why Christians of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany challenged the Nazi ideology and its practices – and many of them lost their lives. Others justified keeping their vows to the state by using such texts to divide up reality into compartments. But there would not have been any Christian left to tell the tale if the Confessing Christians had not exercised discretion in the way they resisted the government.

Jesus was not stupid either, when confronted with the invitation to put his life on the line for what he believed in, as here. His reply was, I think, deliberately ambiguous – ambiguous enough, not to get him into trouble.

This passage exposes the fallacy of dividing reality into God’s area and other areas. It invites us to reflect on this primarily in relation to big issues of our day, but it also relates closely to individual spirituality which says ‘Let the transforming love of God also affect my relationships, my budget, my planning and my family.’

Today’s big issues – such as climate change, poverty, the plight of the millions of refugees in the world, and the effects of globalisation, to name but a few, are inseparably bound up with politics. How can the questions that these issues raise not be both spiritual and political?

This means that we are called to look beyond our own individual advantage and ask the question: What must be done for the common good?

And that might mean paying higher taxes so that those who live in poverty might have a chance; or paying higher electricity bills so that cleaner energy might emerge as our major supply of electricity; or being prepared to welcome wholeheartedly, those who seek the safety of our shores.

God encompasses the whole of life and if that sometimes makes life difficult for politicians who are called to account for their actions then so be it.

### **Song**    *God of freedom, God of justice*

God of freedom, God of justice, God whose love is strong as death,  
God who saw the dark of prison, God who knew the price of faith:  
touch our world of sad oppression with your Spirit’s healing breath.

Rid the earth of torture's terror, God whose hands were nailed to wood;  
hear the cries of pain and protest, God who shed the tears and blood;  
move in us the power of pity, restless for the common good.

Make in us a captive conscience quick to hear, to act, to plead;  
make us truly sisters, brothers of whatever race or creed:  
teach us to be fully human, open to each other's need.

*TiS 657 Shirley E Murray. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439*

**Prayers of the People** (Prepared by Norm Dezius)

Dear Lord , we come before you, to pray for your people throughout the world and right here in Tamworth. As you know Lord, your people are carrying burdens at this time from the pandemic, floods, fires, climate change and unstable Governments and conflicting messages being given. We look to you for comfort, peace and guidance as we all are aware that all things are yours dear Lord and we need you so dearly at present.

We therefore pray, that everywhere on earth the Church may speak out without fear, for peace and the rights and dignity of human kind, that justice, love and responsible freedom may be the basis of the social order in the world and in our country, that all may live in peace and security. We ask that all humanity may share equitably in the world's material and spiritual gifts, and that the Governments of the world and right here in Tamworth may help and protect the weak and the victims of circumstances that are in our mind right at this moment. May all people have a strong sense of societal responsibility and actively participate toward the common welfare of our world and the weak and vulnerable.

We strive so the Church in our country may bear witness to God's kingdom; that it does not become bogged down in administrative issues and help us Lord so that our country and community members may play a role of honour in the family of nations and cooperate in world peace, unity and justice. God, you love people and people are your concern. Make us share in your care through your Son who became one of us, Jesus Christ our Lord

Dear God, we your children may be thinking that all our concerns are imploding in on us, we may feel like we cannot keep up, but deep in our hearts, we know that you are aware of everything we have, we fear, we stress over, but we also know, *but sometimes forget*, that God's generosity and Fatherly care for every being in the world knows no bounds. Instead of withholding anything, God gives everything! He sent His Son to die and be raised from the grave for us, he bestowed on us joy and life and invited us to be one of his disciples. He placed His name on us through the sacrament of baptism, just as he has done here today with Daniel. Christ adopted us all, as His own and has made a place for us in the Kingdom of God; He continues to forgive and restore every person and calls us to step out, lift our heads and follow Him in joyful unity.

We are confident in your love as we say the prayer you have given us:

Our Father who art 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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

**Song**    *What does the Lord require*

What does the Lord require for praise and offering?  
What sacrifice desire or tribute bid you bring?  
Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.  
Rulers of earth, give ear! should you not justice show?  
Will God your pleading hear, while crime and cruelty grow?  
Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.

Leaders in wealth and trade, for whom the worker toils,  
think not to win God's aid if greed your commerce soils.  
Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.

Still down the ages ring the prophet's stern commands:  
to merchant, worker, king, he brings God's high demands.  
Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.

How shall our life fulfil God's law so hard and high?  
Let Christ endue our will with grace to fortify.  
Then justly, in mercy, we'll humbly walk with God.

*TiS 618 Albert F Bayly. Public Domain*

**Closing Responses**

From where we are to where you need us,  
**Jesus, now lead on.**

From the security of what we know to the adventure of what you will reveal,  
**Jesus, now lead on.**

To refashion the fabric of this world  
until it resembles the shape of your kingdom,  
**Jesus, now lead on.**

**Blessing**

As you follow the way of Christ this week  
may you know the blessing of God:  
Creator, Son and Life-giver.  
**Amen!**