

Sunday Collects, Readings and Reflection
18th October 2020 19th after Trinity

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service
which you can find here <https://youtu.be/WHj3wU2jU>,
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel
or via the link provided on our website www.shamleygreen.net*



COLLECT

Faithful Lord,
whose steadfast love never ceases
and whose mercies never come to an end:
grant us the grace to trust you
and to receive the gifts of your love,
new every morning;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Christ Church chancel window depicting Hope and Love

FIRST READING

Isaiah 45:1-7

1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed:
2 I will go before you and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,
3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.
5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
6 so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west,
that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.
7 I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

GOSPEL

Matthew 22:15-22

When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables,
they realized that Jesus was speaking about them.
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 The Revd. Sally Davies (*Watch in our recorded service*)

Matt 22:15-17

That is a real 'Heads I win, Tails you lose' question! Jesus' nation was not an independent country or people; they were occupied by the Romans. And the payment of taxes, therefore, not exactly popular in our own time and place, was even less so for Jesus' contemporaries for whom taxes were tribute paid to the foreign power, underlining their own subject status. If Jesus answers 'yes', he will incur the anger and dislike of the people and lose credit with them. If he says 'no', he will be effectively declaring himself a rebel against the occupying forces.

So it is not a genuine question. Those posing it are not seeking information or wisdom, guidance or advice. Nor are they looking for a good debate, an airing of the issues, seeking a way forward through open discussion. No, it is quite obviously a trap and a clever one. What *can* Jesus reply, what will he do? Let's find out.

Matt 22:18-22

Well it was a clever trap but an even cleverer answer. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's"?! Very neat. In one sense quite black and white but, of course, in another quite nuanced because which things are *not* God's? Which *are* the emperor's? And who owes what to whom? Is there really a distinction between secular and sacred in the world-view of the person of faith?

If the question was intended to trap, the answer is intended to open up thought and discussion, to beg more questions and to get people thinking for themselves.

When people ask me questions as a Christian, and a priest at that, they do so for a variety of reasons. Some ask out of interest, seeking information or another opinion; of those, some want a black and white answer (code for: "tell me what to think and what to do") and others, help in working out their own answer. Some ask out of need, seeking guidance, counsel, perhaps comfort and reassurance. Some ask as a covert challenge, seeking to provoke a reaction, possibly looking for an argument more than a debate. And some ask like the questioners in today's reading in order to trap, wrong-foot, or indeed find an excuse for discounting the answer when it comes. You can probably see from this that often when we ask questions, we do not always have straightforward motives and sometimes we already know the answer we want. When we answer others' questions, it may be not much different! How tempting when people *want* to be told what to do and how to live their life, to tell them. How tempting when in a position of authority or power, to lay down the law according to oneself. And how tempting when faced with a challenge or a no-win situation, to react with aggression, to put down the challenger and leave him or her looking stupid.

Jesus sidesteps the trap, refuses the temptation to lay down the law (anyone's law) and the equally great temptation to diminish his opponents, and sends them away instead with their malice defused, a sense of amazement at the encounter - and something to think about.

Parents and teachers quite often tell me how their children ask them questions about God, our Christian faith and practice, life and death which they find really difficult to answer. In fact, sometimes I have been invited round as the local expert to discuss those questions with the children - always great fun. Other folk tell me how hard they find it to field questions about their faith from relatives or friends and of course I've had similar experiences myself. Yet how wonderful if in our secular age people do actually show an interest in our faith, our relationship with God, and want to know more. Even if their questions are like that posed to Jesus, deliberately provocative or critical, what a great opportunity to talk about what is most important to us, what gives us life and both directs and inspires how we live that life. And how encouraging if our children see something in the way we live and relate to each other and the world around us which catches their interest and makes them curious to learn more.

May our answers never 'lay down the law', put our questioners down, avoid the question or seek to meet our own needs more than theirs. Instead, may they go away as did the questioners in today's reading having encountered the amazing love and wisdom of God, encouraged to think and explore further, and with the knowledge that we will always be willing to accompany and help them - and take further questions.

FINAL PRAYER

God of servant rule,
your kingdom breaks our tangled webs
where state and church collude to worship power and trade on fear:
grant us the wit and will to give you what is your own,
no more nor less than all the world and time;
through Jesus Christ, whose kingdom comes. Amen.
(Steven Shakespeare 'Prayers for an Inclusive Church')

BLESSING

God the holy Trinity
make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side
and guide you in the ways of truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
rest upon you this day and remain with you always. Amen.



Pulpit detail

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