

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
OCTOBER 18, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name* Setting: Robert J. Powell

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #940 *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*

- 1 **Holy God, we praise Thy name;
Lord of all, we bow before Thee.
All on earth Thy scepter claim,
All in heav'n above adore Thee.
Infinite Thy vast domain,
Everlasting is Thy reign.**
- 2 **Hark! The glad celestial hymn
Angel choirs above are raising;
Cherubim and seraphim,
In unceasing chorus praising,
Fill the heav'ns with sweet accord:
Holy, holy, holy Lord!**
- 3 **Lo, the _apostles' holy train
Join Thy sacred name to hallow;
Prophets swell the glad refrain,
And the white-robed martyrs follow,
And from morn to set of sun
Through the Church the song goes on.**
- 4 **Thou art King of Glory, Christ;
Son of God, yet born of Mary.
For us sinners sacrificed,
As to death a Tributary,
First to break the bars of death,
Thou hast opened heav'n to faith.**
- 5 **Holy Father, holy Son,
Holy Spirit, three we name Thee;
Though in essence only one,
Undivided God we claim Thee
And, adoring, bend the knee
While we own the mystery.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:

We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:

You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,

You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. O God, the protector of all who trust in You,

have mercy on us; that with You as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Isaiah 45:1-7

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped,
to subdue nations before him
and to loose the belts of kings,
to open doors before him
that gates may not be closed:
“I will go before you
and level the exalted places,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
I will give you the treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I form light and create darkness,
I make well-being and create calamity,
I am the LORD, who does all these things.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 96:1-9

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Thessalonians 1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

**Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
Alleluia, alleluia.**

GOSPEL Matthew 22:15–22

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 22nd chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

Today’s text picks up the narrative of Jesus’ last days in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. Jesus has just finished a series of parables designed to indirectly – but still clearly – convey the authority he has as God’s Son. Upon hearing these parables, the religious leaders, who at this point are very much set against Jesus, plot how they can coax words from him that might be a little more direct – words which they can use against him.

When they return to Jesus, they bring with them some Herodians – those who were more supportive of the Roman occupiers and who might serve to sway Jesus in that direction also. The trap they lay is to ask Jesus a question about taxes. “Tell us,” they say, “is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” The leaders know that if Jesus says “no” he will be in trouble with the Roman authorities who ruled the land. However, if Jesus says “yes” he will anger the people, who resented the Roman occupation and expected leaders to resent them as well.

Jesus recognizes their trap, and he chastises them for putting him to the test once again, calling them “hypocrites.” He then asks them to produce a coin for the tax. When the leaders quickly produce a coin, Jesus has already made his point. The leaders are happy to do business with Caesar by using his coins, why then should they raise a question about giving Caesar his due? Those who have coins in their pockets and are trying to trap someone else with them are hypocrites.

But Jesus then goes on to ask: “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” When they reply “Caesar’s,” Jesus tells them: “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When the religious leaders and the crowds hear this, they marvel. Then the leaders leave.

Jesus had avoided another trap. Or had he? Within a few days the crowds of people would turn against Jesus. When asked to choose an arrested citizen of theirs to release, the people would choose a known insurrectionist named Barabbas over him. Of Jesus they would chant: “crucify him, crucify him.”

Could it be that this statement of Jesus, while marveling them initially, troubled them the more they thought about it? Had Jesus shown a loyalty to Rome, or at least an unwillingness to stand up to them?

Was he just using perplexing statements because he was afraid to take a stand? What kind of leader was he?

This great statement of Jesus – “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” – has been the subject of great scrutiny and debate ever since Jesus said it. Some have seen in it the giving of great principles like the distinction between the sacred and the secular or the separation of church and state. Most commentators, however, discourage us from finding such absolutes in this phrase.

But what, then, do these words mean?

When Jesus says “render” – he’s using a word that calls us to pay back something that is owed. According to his statement, we are to render both to Caesar and to God.

Regarding our rendering to Caesar, Lutherans have always seen in these words of Jesus a clear directive to support our government by paying taxes. We see this, in part, by the reaction of the religious leaders, who walked away in amazement, it seems, because Jesus had been so clear in supporting the Roman tax. They were amazed that he took such a stand.

In the section of Luther’s Small Catechism called “The Table of Duties,” passages of scripture are given “for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities.” Under the holy order (or “vocation”) of “citizen,” the first Bible passage listed is our text— “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”

Citizens, we believe, owe their loyalty and support to the governing authorities. This doesn’t mean that we must agree with everything that our government says and does. It does mean, however, that we do our part in supporting the government, including those parts which we may not like – in which case we can also work peacefully for positive change.

Just as Jesus was asked about authority in his day, so also Martin Luther and the reformers were asked for their view of authority too. Lutheran teaching on authority is commonly known as “two kingdom theology.” Yes, Jesus just spoke of one Kingdom—the “Kingdom of God.” But God clearly exercises his authority in the kingdom through two means: the church and the state.

God’s spiritual authority is exercised through the Church, which we call the right-hand kingdom. God does this through the preaching of the Gospel – conveying to us the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ our Savior.

God also exercises his authority through the kingdoms of men. These political or temporal authorities are known collectively as the left-hand kingdom. In this kingdom, consisting of government, laws, state, the sword, and all things that belong to the physical world, God works to bring order and peace.

So “yes,” as followers of Christ, and according to God’s work through the left-hand kingdom, we render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

And yet, the greater commandment given here by Jesus is to render unto God the things that are God’s. Which leads us to ask: “what are the things that are God’s?”

It would be easy to simply say “all things are God’s.” That would, of course, be true. But certainly, Jesus must have had in mind something more specific.

To answer this question, Bible interpreters from the earliest centuries have keyed in on Jesus’ use of the word “likeness” in this text. When Jesus asked regarding the coin: “whose likeness and inscription

is this?" he knew that it bore the image of Caesar. God's people know, from the very first chapter in scripture, that the image of God is borne... by people. Genesis tells us: "So God created man in his image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

You and I, as people, are the ones who bear the image of God. Therefore, according to the command of Jesus, we are to render ourselves to God. Our whole selves.

Thinking about this, I was reminded, from our liturgy, of Psalm 116 (v. 12-14) which says:

"What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people."

When the psalmist asks about rendering to the Lord, the first thing he mentions is an offering of worship and praise. We are to "lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." When we do this, God then fills our cup with his goodness and grace. We render our praise to God as a response to his benefits, and he in turn blesses us even more.

Our Psalm for today, the opening verses of Psalm 96, also gives a great example of what it means to offer God our worship and praise. Verse seven captures the essence of worship particularly well:

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Going back to Psalm 116, we also see a second thing mentioned as something to render to God. "I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people." This reminds us that we are also to give God our commitment. We do this with our offerings. And we do this with the public confession of our faith.

Jesus may have told the people to pay their taxes to Caesar. But they were to give something far greater to God. They were to give God their loyalty and praise.

Knowing all of this, we see that Jesus' words that day were not nearly as supportive of Rome as some people may have thought. Rome, after all, wasn't content with just wanting people's money. Rome also wanted the people to worship their emperor.

It is significant that Jesus asked for a coin that day. The coin Jesus requested not only bore an image of Caesar but also an inscription. The inscription would have said: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus."

The Roman Caesars had by this point claimed to be divine. They saw themselves as gods to the people. And they expected the people to treat them and acknowledge them as such.

Jesus, in his words, clearly stands against this thinking. Caesar and God are completely different. Caesar may be deserving of some tax money, but only God is deserving of praise.

Many Christians who carried these words of Jesus with them in the following decades would be challenged by the Romans on this teaching. Most would stand strong and remember that only the one true God is worthy of praise, and the only Son of God is Jesus Christ. Their strong stance would be a witness to the world. And the many who were martyred would serve as seed for the new faith.

In our day today, centuries later, people are still challenged in the same way. We are tempted to find our gods here in this world rather than acknowledge the One that rules from above.

Many people put far more of their trust, effort and attention toward the leader of a nation, or one of its parties, than they do to God. They render to Caesar as their great hope and pay little attention to God.

Others put their trust in money, or human wisdom, or their own skill. Jesus' words today warn us against such misplaced trust. They hearken back to that earlier teaching of his: "you cannot serve both God and mammon."

As Christian people, we can give to Caesar with a glad heart because Caesar, as God's left hand, will provide many things God wants for his people. And yet, we must not forget to give to that greater work of God too—the work of proclaiming of his word, through his right hand, the church.

Most of all, we must put our ultimate trust only in God our heavenly Father. We are to give our whole selves to God because he has given his whole self for us – as shown when he came to us as Jesus and went to the cross for our salvation.

May God then bless our rendering to him. And may we always see in that rendering God's goodness and grace. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #834 O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth

- 1 O God, O Lord of heav'n and earth,
Thy living finger never wrote
That life should be an aimless mote,
A deathward drift from futile birth.
Thy Word meant life triumphant hurled
In splendor through Thy broken world.
Since light awoke and life began,
Thou hast desired Thy life for man.**

- 2 Our fatal will to equal Thee,
Our rebel will wrought death and night.
We seized and used in prideful spite
Thy wondrous gift of liberty.
We housed us in this house of doom,
Where death had royal scope and room,
Until Thy servant, Prince of Peace,
Breached all its walls for our release.**

- 3 Thou camest to our hall of death,
O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air,
To drink for us the dark despair
That strangled our reluctant breath.
How beautiful the feet that trod
The road that leads us back to God!
How beautiful the feet that ran
To bring the great good news to man!**

- 4 **O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it might be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be those whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING *O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth* Setting: Jan Bender

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

O Lord, deliver Your people by Your power, and grant to us grace sufficient for all our needs and for the needs of all people.

Brief silence

Let us pray to the Lord to open the eyes of the blind by the light of His Word and to open the ears of the deaf with the voice of His Gospel, and for the Lord to clear the way for all people to know the riches of His grace, the gift of forgiveness and the promise of life in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray to the Lord to raise up evangelists who will witness the Gospel, for preachers who will testify to the mighty act of deliverance on the cross by which we have been saved, and for the Lord to bless His Church and all church workers who serve us in His name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray to the Lord to teach us to trust not in our works but in His Word, and for a steadfast faith to endure in time of test, trial and tribulation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray to the Lord to bless our nation with peace and harmony, and for the Lord to bless our president, governor, all legislators and judges, and those who protect and defend us against all the enemies of our land. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray to the Lord to heal the sick, give relief to the suffering, grant comfort to those who mourn, and give peace to the dying, especially _____ and those we name in our hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray to the Lord on behalf of those who serve as doctors and nurses, for medical researchers and those who work to end disease, and for those who care for people most vulnerable. Lord, in Your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Let us pray to the Lord for the renewal of our lives of prayer and devotion, interceding on behalf of all those in need and those who have devoted themselves to the Lord's work. Lord, in Your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Let us pray to the Lord for our stewardship of His creation, for our faithful use of all His gifts, and for grateful hearts, that we may honor the Lord with our words and with our works. Lord, in Your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Let us pray to the Lord that we may not forget those who delivered to us the sacred deposit and taught us the faith, and let us join them in passing on the faith to those yet to come. Lord, in Your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Let us pray to the Lord that we may remain steadfast and immovable in faith, and that we may endure to the day of His coming again, when we shall be reunited with those who have gone before us with the sign of faith and now rest from their labors, to live in His eternal presence and sing His praise without end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

- 1 O sing to the Lord,
O sing God a new song.
O sing to the Lord,
O sing God a new song.
O sing to the Lord,
O sing God a new song.
O sing to our God,
O sing to our God.

- 2 For God is the Lord!
And God has done wonders.
For God is the Lord!
And God has done wonders.
For God is the Lord!
And God has done wonders.
O sing to our God,
O sing to our God.

- 3 So dance for our God
And blow all the trumpets.
So dance for our God
And blow all the trumpets.
So dance for our God
And blow all the trumpets.
And sing to our God,
And sing to our God.

- 4 O shout to our God,
Who gave us the Spirit.
O shout to our God,
Who gave us the Spirit.
O shout to our God,
Who gave us the Spirit.
O sing to our God,
O sing to our God.

- 5 For Jesus is Lord!
Amen! Alleluia!
For Jesus is Lord!
Amen! Alleluia!
For Jesus is Lord!
Amen! Alleluia!
O sing to our God,
O sing to our God.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE *O Sing to the Lord* Setting: Brad Hall

Acknowledgments

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