

**WORSHIP SERVICE FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS 18th October 2020.**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of God who is present with us here be yours today and always.

Amen.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the land in which I live, work and worship.
To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nations past, present and emerging.

Call to worship:

The choices are always before us, clear or ambiguous, inviting or challenging. In every moment there is the call to choose our loyalties and to give others their due.

God is in the midst, guiding and encouraging, calling and watching, as we tread with human vulnerability through the complexities of life.

Be near to us now, we pray O God, for we long to be your people.

Hymn: 180 (TiS) 'God of many names.'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

We thank you O God, for the way in which Jesus looked people in the face and claimed the ground for your way of truth. The Christ, whose humanness meant that the life of God engaged all sorts of people is truly our hope and inspiration.

We thank you that these encounters were not meek and mild but were rich in strength and determination.

Our hearts are lifted in gratitude for all the examples of this life which lie before us in every generation.

Thanks be to you, O God.

O God in Christ Jesus, there are times when we are tempted to put others to the test. If they threaten our way of life with you, giving the impression that we are not your true servants, compared to themselves, diminishing their view of things and criticising their beliefs and choices.

Forgive us, O Christ. Bring us to a renewed life of humility before you, we pray.

Then there are moments when we would like to claim that we have seen your face, especially when we are confronted by others. We imagine that we alone know what you look like and who you are as the God of creation.

Forgive us, O Christ. Bring us into a renewed life of humility before you, we pray. **Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness:

Reach out and touch the rock of love. There is never a time or place when God's grace is not offered to us, if we come in humility and faith.

We are forgiven! **Thanks be to God.**

Doxology: 772 (TiS) 'Worship, honour, glory, blessing'.

Reading: Exodus 33: 12 – 23, Mathew 22: 15-22

Hymn: 117 (TiS) 'The Lord Jehovah reigns'

Message: 'Putting things in perspective'.

It began in Mathew chapter 21 – 22, when a number of Jewish leaders questioned Jesus about his authority (21: 23 – 27). In chapter 22: 23 – 33 they questioned him about the resurrection then they questioned him about the Law in chapter 22: 34 – 40. All to do with trying to trap him saying something that will justify getting rid of him.

Here in our passage for today (22: 15 – 22), disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, an unlikely pairing of partisans. The Herodians represents supporters of Herod and the Roman occupiers. They came, again, trying to trap Jesus with a trick question.

First, they tried flattering him by speaking of his integrity, commitment to truth and his lack of interest about the opinions of others.

Their question was: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

The tax they are talking about is the census tax which is paid to the Roman emperor. So, if Jesus answers yes, that would be seen as supporting and justifying the Roman occupation and the oppression of the Jews. If he answers no, he could be seen as a revolutionary that is against Rome.

Jesus was aware of their trap and calls them hypocrites because he knew of their trick (flattery) which about the outside impression, but their hearts has evil intent.

Jesus then asks for a coin; a denarius and he asks them to identify whose image is on the coin. When they identify the emperor's face and title on the coin, Jesus gave them his answer; "Give therefore to the emperors the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (22: 21)

The last part of Jesus's answer challenges both the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians to identify those things are of God, if any. That is the focus of this passage. Especially when Jesus had been using the Old Testament repeatedly in the gospel of Mathew. The coin may have been created by Caesar but what did God create?

If Caesar's image is on what he created, shouldn't God's image be on everything that God created? "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Psalm 24: 1...), "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19: 1)

The person whose image is on the coin has limited authority over anything else outside his empire, but God has dominion over all that God has created including Caesar.

The challenge for the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians then and for us now is whose image do you see when we make decisions in life. Does the way we treat creation reflect our belief in the God the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen?

Or does it reflect our allegiance to the powers that occupy land that does not belong to them and remain silent while people are oppressed?

Notices:

Offering:

Prayers of the People:

O God, as we travel through life, we pray that we will recognise that you are with us. We know we can never possess you, or fully understand all that you are, but we pray for your guidance in each day.

May your life and choices add to the goodness which others experience and may all that we offer be given in true humility and faithfulness.

We hear the cries of people around the world, as they struggle for justice and freedom. We see the violence directed against them as they try to achieve even small degrees of democracy. We pray for these people now: May the voice of our country be raised in support of the rights of others, we pray.

Help us to open our arms to those who look for safety and hope. Give us the words to say when people question the nature of our faith, so that we may not betray your love for us, O Christ.

May we listen and respond with humble hearts, as we relate to those who are searching for truth or longing to know who you are.

Touch all that we do, O God, that it may be your work in the world.

Remember those who are grieving this day and those who are not well. Hasten the time of healing and fill their hearts with comfort that they may come to believe, that you are always with them in life and even in death. Until you bring all your people to life everlasting. **Amen.**

Hymn: 563 (TiS) 'Let him to whom we now belong'.

Blessing:

Go in peace to be God's people.

And may God be found beside us; the goodness of Christ passes near to us each day and the life of the Spirit lift our hearts.

Amen.