

**SUMMARY: CHRIST & POLITICS***Matthew 22:15-22*

**Our text today is set in the hugely charged political atmosphere of 1<sup>st</sup> C Israel.** They'd been under Roman rule for many years, and particularly so since becoming part of the Roman Province of Judea in 6BCE, with now with Herod the Great being tolerated by Rome as their shamelessly collaborator King. The Jewish people were divided into largely two main groups: *the Herodians* who supported King Herod and his family and *the Pharisees* who did not. What united them was how both groups felt deeply threatened by this young itinerant rabbi from Nazareth who was stirring the people up with all sorts of new and subversive teachings about God and life, teachings that they believed threatened them in their place of settled privilege. And so they set out to trap him! That's the setting of our reading from Matthew 22:15-22, presented for us this week by Linnea Good, reading from the NRSV.

**What was Jesus to do?** The Herodians were very much in favour of continuing to pay taxes to Rome because it was in their interests to do so – currying favour with their overlords, their benefactors. The Pharisees longed for a time when the people would once again be free of the yoke of Rome – free to rule themselves, and so deeply resented paying anything to Rome. *If Jesus sided with the Herodians, Rome would be happy because he sided with the status quo and their power, but he would immediately become unpopular with the Pharisees and most of the common folk. But if he sided with the Pharisees, well, he could be seen to be challenging Rome and so guilty of sedition - putting himself and his mission into serious danger.*

**What was he to do?** He answered their trick question with a question of his own – a question which both challenged and confounded them! ***'Give to the Emperor – give to Caesar - the things of Caesar and to God the things of God!'*** We live in SUCH highly charged political times! We always have! We always will! And Jesus won't be tricked into playing our personally-biased-political games! But that's not to say that Jesus is not interested in our politics! **Jesus and our politics apparently DO mix!** *That* may be surprising for those of us who were brought up to believe that they don't.

What we believe about being a Christ-follower **MUST** surely **MOST PROFOUNDLY** influence our thinking, our doing, all of our everyday living! **Our Faith In Jesus – as Christ-followers - MUST EFFECT/AFFECT all of who and what we are – and that includes Our Political Thinking.** Notice that I'm not only speaking about Christ's AFFECT on us and our thinking, as his EFFECTING of it – his CAUSING it to become whatever it is. I'm speaking about how what we believe about life and how best we are to be living our lives - the choices we make, the priorities we set - MUST be the expression of what we believe forms the faith-basis of all very being! Because either my faith in Christ DOES effect/affect everything about me, or else it's kind of irrelevant! What our faith **MAY NEVER** become is simply some optional religious bauble with which we choose to decorate our lives! When we speak about politics – *from the Greek 'polis' or city-state* - we're speaking specifically about things pertaining to our civic or communal living: It has to do with how we relate to those who govern us, how they relate to us, as well as how especially we relate to one another!

*I remember some years ago being in SA during a worker's march past our church in Port Elizabeth.*

*We were next to the large Greenacres shopping mall. It was hot and the marchers were tired, needing a break. The mall manager denied the marchers access to the parking lot and mall washrooms because ‘he didn’t want to be political’. ‘Congratulations’ my colleague told that manager as we made the church’s washrooms available, ‘you’ve just made your first political decision.’* **If our faith in Jesus Christ is not impacting our political lives, it is irrelevant!**

The US is currently facing what some feel may be the most NB presidential election in modern times. We pray God’s wisdom for those voters. We have our BC provincial voting underway, having to decide on all sorts of priorities of our own. When it comes to our voting in any election: *it BEHOOVES us* – it’s our Christian and civic duty - not to vote following just our most basic ego-instincts, not just to choose whatever we feel will best serve ourselves and our own best interests - but to do our best to align our choices with what we believe Christ requires of us – what he is actually all about! **WWJD?** Think about his unapologetic emphasis on **Justice. Reconciliation. Healing. Fairness.** What this means is that **It’s not just about our personal self-gain!** It must always be about our calling to **focus especially on the needs of the most vulnerable, the most marginalized among us.** It’s about our finding and then supporting policies that demonstrate our **deepest respect for one another!** It’s about our supporting those leaders who focus on **the protection & preservation of our planet** - the Godly-things that we must mostly allow ourselves & all our living to be defined by!

**And so we should make no mistake here: It was a profoundly political statement Jesus made in our text today!** It may have seemed that he was dodging their attempt at entrapment, while instead, he was throwing it straight back at them - challenging *them!* Should we be paying taxes to Caesar? Well, we should **‘Give to the Emperor – give to Caesar - the things of Caesar and to God the things of God!’** Commentators point to the verb that Jesus used for that ‘giving’<sup>i</sup> *αποδοτε* which they say implies the giving back of what was once received, it’s the repaying of a debt, a returning of what is owed. What’s more, by Matthew’s Gospel describing Jesus using that particular verb tense<sup>ii</sup> – we see Jesus saying SO MUCH than merely some mild suggestion of how we should live – instead, Matthew presents Jesus as insisting that **‘All of us – we - MUST give back and continue to give back what is owed’** That’s God’s claim on our living! ...an imperative!

**What then has been given to us by God? What does God want back from us as reconciled, Spirit-empowered Christ followers? Surely, everything... Made in the image of God surely ALL OUR LIVING needs to express that! Is that in fact what your life expresses? Are the choices and actions of your everyday living indeed the ‘giving back’ to God that God intends? Just what exactly does your life express? What are you ‘giving back?’** These are deeply challenging questions! My hope though, isn’t so much about the extent to which I believe I ever get these things right! **Instead, my hope is in Christ alone** - and how I believe that it’s only as we are in him that God’s Spirit does God’s profoundly political work of molding us back into being the people that God intends us to be, and then releasing us to do the work God intends God’s people to do! Oh, may it be so! May all of our living – our very political living – come to reflect Christ whom we love, and in whom we live and move and have our being. May it be so... Amen

Rev Robin Jacobson

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<sup>i</sup> JC Fenton *Saint Matthew Pelican* (1985: 353)

<sup>ii</sup> Aorist 2, plural, 2 Person, imperfect