

Worship Resources - Divine Currency - https://youtu.be/D_2EpN-bhdM

20th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

18th October, 2020

Isaiah 45:1-7 CEV / Matthew 22:15-22 CEV

Intro/Prelude ***O Jesus, May Grateful Hymns***

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/nRnA0FtZGew>

Though there are rulers, presidents, kings, queens, God is the Lord of all life. In God we live and move and have our being. God requires our faithfulness and our service. We reach out to others with the same kind of love with which God has touched our lives. Come, let us worship the Lord who is always with us. Let us praise God who walks daily by our side. Amen.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Our tradition at Olympic View is to begin our service greeting and wishing each other peace. This morning, let's open our time together with the following prayer for peace written by local Seattle pastor Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell of the Queen Anne Baptist church

Invocation/Reflection Prayer

Peace, Peace, O God. We crave it, we desire it, we long for it to become our reality in our lifetime. But we know peace cannot come without justice. May Your justice delay no longer, O God. May we pursue justice on behalf of those who are oppressed, marginalized, and rejected. May we pursue justice in our daily lives, for peace must begin with ourselves as we seek justice. May we find Your peace even as we dismantle the painfulness of racism in our lives. May Your peace be made known to us in the face of oppression and evil. May Your peace prevail in our hearts, in our waking up and lying down, in every breath, for peace is in Your presence. Through Your peace, break open our hearts to Your love, for peace and love must go together, and love demands justice. In seeking peace in our daily lives, may we live into the path You have led us, a path of hope and reconciliation that begins with justice and love. May we do this, and live, knowing You are with us, now and always, Prince of Peace. Amen.

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

In our reading from the Isaiah this morning, the prophet speaks of Cyrus the Persian king, being the instrument of God in undoing the reigns of unjust rulers. As we hear these words, let's think about who fulfills that purpose in today's world, or perhaps who should.

Words of the Prophet Isaiah 45:1-7 CEV

The Lord said to Cyrus, his chosen one:

I have taken hold of your right hand to help you capture nations and remove kings from power. City gates will open for you; not one will stay closed.

As I lead you, I will level mountains and break the iron bars on bronze gates of cities.

I will give you treasures hidden in dark and secret places. Then you will know that I, the Lord God of Israel, have called you by name.

Cyrus, you don't even know me! But I have called you by name and highly honored you because of Israel, my chosen servant.

Only I am the Lord! There are no other gods. I have made you strong, though you don't know me.

Now everyone from east to west will learn that I am the Lord. No other gods are real.

I create light and darkness, happiness and sorrow. I, the Lord, do all of this.

Scripture Video Isaiah 45:1-7

https://youtu.be/_a45rDvijoU

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning, we are grateful for the safe and uneventful travels of Roger and Kathy Edmark back to Japan.

We are also grateful for all those who were able to join in Goldie Barnes' birthday drive-by last weekend. It was such a joy to see so many friends participate.

This morning, let's continue to keep Sylvia Hershberger's mother in prayer, as she continues to struggle with some confusion and agitation following her fall and surgery. Let's also remember Sylvia's sister-in-law Connie, as she continues her treatment for cancer.

We are thankful as well for being able to do an abbreviated CROP walk this year in sunny, but breezy weather, doing our part to fight food instability.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

God of majesty, Your glory fills the earth and the heavens. You are the maker of all that is, of all that is good, of all that seeks good, of all beauty and truth and nobility. You surpass all that we think of you. You are found in places that we do expect to find you. You speak to us in ways that are so ordinary that we often fail to hear you and you reveal yourself in things that are so wonderful that we often fail to grasp that you are behind them and in them. Lord, we pray that you may help us to see you and hear you this day.

In silence now, O Lord, we ask that you speak to us and that you hear us and help us. We offer to you our prayers— and we offer to you our hearts and minds and souls so that you may fill them with what you want us to have.

Father and Mother of us all—we know you care for all that you have made and for all whom you have made. Hear now our prayers for our world and for the nations that fill it— for those who hunger and thirst for the bread and water you give in abundance, for the justice and the mercy that you want all to experience, for the peace and the wholeness that you want all to know.

Tender and caring Lord, hear our prayers for those whose pains and sorrows and joys and thanksgivings are upon our hearts this day. We lift them up before you by name in our hearts and with the words of our lips.....

Lord, hear our prayer, **and in your love, answer.** Amen.

Our gospel lesson this morning, we have the familiar story of Jesus being challenged by the Pharisees regarding how one should be faithful as citizens of an empire. As we listen to these words from Matthew, let's think where our loyalties lie, and what we give to God versus the emperors of our day.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 22:15-22 CEV

The Pharisees got together and planned how they could trick Jesus into saying something wrong.

They sent some of their followers and some of Herod's followers[a] to say to him, "Teacher, we know that you are honest. You teach the truth about what God wants people to do. And you treat everyone with the same respect, no matter who they are.

Tell us what you think! Should we pay taxes to the Emperor or not?"

Jesus knew their evil thoughts and said, "Why are you trying to test me? You show-offs!

Let me see one of the coins used for paying taxes." They brought him a silver coin,

and he asked, "Whose picture and name are on it?"

"The Emperor's," they answered.

Then Jesus told them, "Give the Emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to God."

His answer surprised them so much that they walked away

Scripture Video Matthew 22:15-22

<https://youtu.be/y8pkR95jFrc>

Message – Divine Currency

Politics and religion. The often taboo subjects at polite gatherings. The two perspectives most likely to stir up controversy and conflict in our daily interactions. Yet in some ways, two topics that are also invariably related to each other. The moral compass of a ruler or government affects the just or unjust outlook and approach of said body, and likewise, the participation or endorsement of religious bodies with

governments lends validity to those bodies. The debate over the role of faith and government is certainly not a new concept. What is relatively new is our concept of the separation of faith and government. Throughout human history, these two aspects of life have been intertwined. The biblical stories are no different.

Both of our stories this morning address this topic from different perspectives. In Isaiah, God is praising the Persian ruler Cyrus as being God's divine instrument, one who destroys the unjust governments he encounters. Cyrus, who is a pagan ruler from a foreign country. But one who conquers the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and led most of the Jews into exile in Babylon. This follows the corruption of both the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel, with both of them turning away from their covenant with God and embracing the worship of other Gods, even incorporating that worship into their state worship in their respective temples.

In our Wednesday Zoom bible study, we've been studying the books of Amos and Hosea, prophets who pointed out the injustice and heresy of those governments and societies, and warned of the negative consequences of breaking that covenant, of becoming too self-focused and unjust. The kings and ruling class of both kingdoms had lost that commitment to follow God's way, and became self-indulgent and focused on their own prosperity, at the expense of others.

Likewise, in our gospel reading, the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus into becoming enmeshed in the conflict between faith and the leadership of his day. They pose the question to him as to whether faithful Jews should pay taxes to the emperor or not. It's a very loaded question. If Jesus agrees to paying the tax, he is casting himself with those that support the client king Herod and his Roman overlords, and he would put himself at odds with the Zealots and nationalists, alienating himself from the very people he lifts up, the oppressed and downtrodden. If he advocates for not paying the tax, then he opens himself up to charges of sedition and treason by those authorities. Either choice is perilous; either he betrays his people or he declares defiance towards Rome. But rather than get pulled into this trap, Jesus poses a counter question, "Whose picture is on a coin?" In pointing out the likeness of the emperor on the coin, he calls to mind the prohibition on construction idols and graven images. What faithful Jew would have any likeness of Moses or Abraham? Yet that nuance seems to have been lost on the Pharisees. They don't seem to see the problem with possessing as many pagan likenesses as possible. In demonstrating what should be a problem for observant Jews, Jesus poses his question in terms of ownership. This coin belongs to the emperor; his likeness declares his kingdom. This kingdom is marked by wealth,

military strength, and brutality, all the political power rests with the emperor. He is the personification of all the wealth and strength of Rome, and the tax belongs to him. By contrast, what can we say “belongs” to God?

With a tax we know exactly how much is due, and the remainder is ours. What can we expect to hold back from God? What is “ours” in contrast to God’s? As the psalmist states in Psalm 24, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” Yet this concept of images leads to an interesting consideration. Where do we find God’s image? What in creation is made in God’s image? Did not God make humans in God’s image? If that is the case, then we would be the coins of God’s realm.

Jesus calls the Pharisees “hypocrites” first for their uncritical loyalty to the crown, but also for their belief that they can treat God like a great tax collector who can be appeased with a “minimal” tax. They are hypocrites because they honor the pagan emperor and are loyal subjects of his kingdom, yet they hold back from the Lord of the covenant and neglect their true citizenship in God’s kin-dom. It’s important to note that Jesus is not establishing a doctrine of dual kin-doms. He is not declaring that the state is autonomous in its sphere, while the reign of God is confined to its corner. In pointing out their misguided loyalty, Jesus is declaring the preeminence and priority of God’s kin-dom. God’s kin-dom is the original will and plan of God for humanity and creation. It is not a case that we need to carve out space for God from the secular empire. The problem is not how to partition the power in proper proportions; the problem for the believer is how to justify allegiance to the emperor while remaining faithful to God. No one can serve two masters.

What about us? Do we try to serve two masters? We are deep in the throes of possibly one of the most divisive election seasons of our history as a nation. We hear a lot about making our country “great again,” about the importance of our dominance on the world economic and political stage. And while this kind of rhetoric has gained more prominence in recent years, it is certainly nothing new. We are raised to pledge our allegiance to the symbols of our government, we open civic events honoring the state, much of our culture is built around pride and commitment to that state. So, how much like the Pharisees are we? Are we trying to serve two masters? Do we too try to make compartments for our faith and our secular lives? If we are the coins of God’s realm, can we have divided loyalties?

Jesus makes clear that our priorities lie elsewhere than those of the emperor. We give to the empire what belongs to the empire, and our focus is on God’s kin-dom, breaking into this world. Our priority is Jesus’ priority, seeking to live kin-dom lives

here and now: caring for the least of these, seeking justice for those oppressed, welcoming all to the table, AND ensuring all our fed, physically and spiritually. Our motto has nothing to do with worldly prestige, it is putting God first and foremost, and seeking rulers who govern in line with the values of God's kin-dom, not the world's. So as we weather the last few weeks of this contentious political season, let's keep our own place in perspective, as God's currency, and our focus on seeking God's kin-dom, not the empires of men, and truly consider which master we serve. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought as to what role we can play in our own lives this week in ushering the kin-dom of God into this world, and truly giving to God what belongs to God, our very effort and being.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] ***Lord of Light, Your Name Outshining,***
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/ECquMaEAaJI>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

As we offer our gifts and lives in this moment,
may we become imitators of you, Gracious God,
who holds nothing back from us,
but is generous and gracious with all that is yours.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Go now as those who have found favor in the sight of God.
Be imitators of Jesus Christ
and an example to all of the life of faith.
To the world in which you live, give your love and service,
and to God, give all that you are and all that you shall be.

And may the glory of God's goodness be revealed to you;
May the grace and peace of Jesus Christ take root in you;
And may the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fill you with joy.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....*In the name of Christ. Amen.*

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude *Where Cross the Crowded Ways*

performed by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/kGHyCbDoVQI>