

Prayer of the Week:

Set us free, loving Father, from the bondage of our sins, and in your goodness and mercy give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, Proper Twenty-four)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.



Kindness & Goodness

Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV)

October 18th

Intro

The faithfulness listed in the fruit of the Spirit is different from believing faith. It is the faith that follows an initial commitment to Christ; the faith we live by.

Faith is best described as allegiance. Faithfulness, then, is being steadfast in our allegiance to Jesus, who is Ruler over all the nations; Creator of life, the Eternal Word of God.

In this time when our nation is so divided politically, how are we to know what allegiance to Jesus look like? How are we to know when there are people on both sides of the political spectrum who invoke the name of Jesus to defend their position?

Let's turn to the Gospels for some wisdom.

Jesus In Political Trouble

Matthew 22:15-22 tells the story of how Jesus gets into political trouble. Here is the scene:

Herodians are followers of the late King Herod's political philosophy. Herod was of Jewish descent, but had come to power in Rome. Herodians were interested in protecting the status quo. They wanted law and order.

The followers of Jesus (Jewish zealots) who were tired of the politically powerful and desired to be freed from the oppression of Rome. They were attracted to Jesus' message of a new kingdom. The Jewish zealots cried out for liberation.

These two groups are ideological opposites. When they are together a political bomb is thrown in the middle of their gathering - "Does the Torah allow us to pay our taxes?"

If Jesus says "Yes, you should pay your taxes." Then all of his followers who were convinced that a new kingdom was at hand and a new day had arrived would instead be convinced that Jesus is nothing new and complicit in the same system.

If Jesus says, "No, you shouldn't pay taxes because the Torah (the law) says you can't put graven images on things, and money is covered in images of Caesar" then Herodians have cause to bring Jesus up the chain of empirical discipline and have his movement squashed.

In response, Jesus asked, "Whose image is on the coin?" "Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God."

Jesus' response is an invitation to give the thing back to whoever's image is on it - humanity bears God's image!

This passage is an invitation to offer our whole selves to faithful allegiance to Christ as the image-bearers of God!

Our task is to reflect the goodness of God back into the world through faithful witness.

Jesus Refuses To Be Pinned Down

Jesus took this moment to show that allegiance to God is different than right/left political ideologies.

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, faithfulness is allegiance to the way of Jesus and His kingdom.

Here is the situation: The Herodians were so committed to their friendship and relationship to the empire, and so formed by the ways of empire that they were in danger of becoming deaf to the cries of those for whom the current system was no longer working.

In an effort to overturn the system and establish something new, the zealots were in danger of turning to the tools, tricks, and tactics they learned from the empire! They were in danger of being the oppressed who become oppressors.

The fruit of faithfulness in our lives is a faithful reckoning with these realities.

Quartet Of The Vulnerable

Jesus refusing to be pinned down politically should not be taken to mean that the way of Jesus doesn't take any stances on issues.

The quartet of the vulnerable are the widow, orphan, poor, and immigrant. Jesus fulfills the vision of the prophets by continually moving toward these populations and caring for them and showing them justice.

As Christians our stance is clear - we want to protect and bring shalom to vulnerable populations.

Lord, help us be your faithful witnesses.