

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Revd Alan F. Miller**

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Lord, you have welcomed us, saying,

“I know you by name, and you have found favour with me.”

Lord, you have promised us,

“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Lord, you have blessed us, saying,

“I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you.”

Lord, you have humbled us, saying,

“I will proclaim my holy name in your presence.”

**Lord, show us your glory! We worship you!**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Faithful God,

you are here.

Tuck us into the cleft of the rock;

cover us with your hand

when we are anxious,

that we may be courageous

to do your will,

through Christ,

who calls us by name. **Amen.**

**HYMN** All my hope on God is founded

### **PSALM 99**

The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

The LORD is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name.

Holy is he!

Mighty King, lover of justice,

you have established equity;

you have executed justice

and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the LORD our God;

worship at his footstool.

Holy is he!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,

Samuel also was among those who called on his name.

They cried to the LORD, and he answered them.

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;

they kept his decrees,  
and the statutes that he gave them.

O LORD our God, you answered them;  
you were a forgiving God to them,  
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.  
Extol the LORD our God,  
and worship at his holy mountain;  
for the LORD our God is holy.

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

The Lord says:  
I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I will  
have compassion.  
Let us now confess our sin,  
casting ourselves on the promised mercy and  
compassion of God.

Holy God  
we confess that we have not loved you  
with all our heart, soul, mind and strength;  
That we have not loved our neighbour as we love ourselves  
nor as we hope to be loved.

We confess that we collude with a society  
in which there is little reverence for the values of your kingdom,  
for we are too comfortable with a world  
in which the poor are exploited and many go hungry.

We confess that we have worshipped  
false gods of power and status,  
of wealth and prosperity and our own agendas  
living lives that are self-centred, and not centred on you, O God.

Loving God, forgive us, have mercy on us, heal us of all that is wrong  
and renew us for service in Christ's name.

The Lord comes to us with a new covenant, saying:  
"I will write my law on your hearts;  
I will forgive your wrongdoing  
and remember your sins no more."

Sisters and Brothers,  
.....your sins are forgiven;  
..... be at peace.

## **MATTHEW 22: 15-22**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.

Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius.

Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

## **REFLECTION**

Holy Spirit,  
illumine your Word for us  
that the message of the gospel  
may come to us in power. **Amen.**

In an increasingly secular and diverse society, in which many strands of culture, belief and ideas are being constantly woven together to create new patterns in our national life, the church cannot any longer presume that its voice should be heard above any of the others. Nevertheless the church continues to speak of those values which serve to build a society that seeks the well-being of all: values of compassion, love, justice and peace.

And if the church finds that it no longer holds the place at the heart of communities across the country, and is becoming increasingly marginalised, then that is no bad thing; for it is on the margins that the church is called to live with those who are among the least, the most vulnerable, and the poorest in our society and in the world. And if what we believe about God is true, then we have no need of any other power, whether civil or political, to be true to God and to our calling as Christians engaged with the world in which we live.

And we believe that what God has to say through us, in word and action, are truths that do not fade with the passing of time, and which need to continue to be spoken to a world in which there is much injustice and oppression, inequality and exploitation, poverty and hunger. A world that needs words of hope and love.

So today we hear the words of Jesus: Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. We know the contrast between God's power and the powers of this world; between the kingdom of God and earthly kingdoms of the world; between the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the values that women and men so often choose to live by instead.

When the Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus with their question about paying tax to Rome,

they are looking to trap him into condemning himself out of his own mouth. As they see it, whichever way he answers the question, either the Jewish mob or the Roman authorities will be paying for his blood. Smarter than his questioners, the reply Jesus gives is not just a clever answer to a dangerous question, but a statement of profound truth about the loyalties owed by people of faith who live both as citizens of this world, and as citizens of God's kingdom.

On the one hand, the Pharisees as a religious elite, were strongly opposed to Roman occupation of their country; on the other, the supporters of Herod depended upon their allegiance with Rome for position of influence. Usually, these two groups would have been at daggers drawn, but now are united by their opposition to Jesus, who speaks a great deal about the kingdom of God, and the need for people to change the way they live, and promises an overturning of the usual order of things, all the while denouncing the corruption of the ruling elites at court and in the Temple.

Fearful of losing their privilege and power, which depends on maintaining things just as they are, the establishment connives to bring him down. They are however confounded when Jesus doesn't give a straight answer, but instead asks the question, whose image is this on the coin? 'Caesar's' they reply. 'Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to God' .

The coin bears Caesar's image, it belongs to him, so pay the tax that is owed to the Roman Emperor. The question then is, what belongs to God? The answer is – we do; as people who bear God's image – however we might understand that - we belong to God and should give God what God requires of us, heart and soul, our lives offered to God's service in faith and trust, so that we can be used to achieve God's purposes of love that have been made known to us in Jesus himself.

For God, is a king who rules over all nations, a lover of justice, who acts to ensure that the world is ordered with equity, setting out the principles by which we must all live if we are to flourish as men and women together in all our wonderful variety; a God who is slow to anger and quick to forgive, and whose greatest desire is that all people should know a fullness of life beyond our imagining.

There are those who say that what Jesus means when he answers the Pharisees, is that the church should mind its own business: that we should concern ourselves only with matters of faith and spirituality, never involving itself in politics or with the messy compromises of everyday human living, living as loyal citizens and paying our dues as required. Almost as if there could be no interchange, no point of contact, between the things of this world, and the things of God.

The truth, I say to you, is that as citizens of both this world and of God's kingdom, Christians in the church are called to play our part in this world's shaping. In particular, for those of us who live in this country, where we have the opportunity to contribute to society by peaceful and democratic means, rather than with the jackboot and the barrel of a gun, we have a duty, an obligation as well as a responsibility to be involved, to challenge the way things are, to seek justice and to pursue peace on behalf of those God holds dear: the last and the least among the people of our own community and among the nations of the world.

It is to their service that we are called, when we seek to use the things that belong to Caesar to change the world, that it may belong to God.

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

We thank you, Generous God,  
for all that you have given us;  
By your power you brought us into being,  
giving us life, and guiding us by your prophets  
to walk in your ways.

You came to us in Jesus Christ, God with us,  
and through his death and resurrection  
you have opened the way to eternal life  
in your everlasting kingdom.

We have received your Holy Spirit  
to stir us up, enlivening the Church  
to be your people in the world  
living and proclaiming the Good News.

Loving God, we know that you are steadfast  
in loving faithfulness to us and all the world;  
May your Spirit empower us to imitate you:

by receiving those who feel judged and rejected,  
by walking alongside those who despair,  
by encouraging those who tend to the broken,  
by affirming those who labor in love.

We lift into your tender care  
those whose bodies, minds, or spirits have been  
weakened or crushed.

We lift up to your compassionate grace  
those whose burdens, guilt, or fears seem too massive to bear.

We lift before your expansive mercy  
those whose hatred, rage, or vengeance cannot be contained.

Receive all these cares, loving God,  
and fill us with the light of Christ,  
through the work of your Spirit. **Amen.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**HYMN** 470 Jesus shall reign

## **BENEDICTION**

