

GIVING BACK THE THINGS OF THE GOD TO THE GOD

Hear again the Word of God for this twentieth Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost.

He said to them, "All of you give back from the things of Caesar to Caesar; and the things of the God to the God."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

I bring you greetings from the sinner-saints at Catalina Lutheran Church, and the Hold Fast Fellowship, our Circuit's Campus ministry at the University. This day, as I give the things of God back to God, I offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving that my connection with Faith Lutheran Church and School goes back to Summer 1998. In the years following that year, my sons graduated from your fine school. They had been properly formed through solid Lutheran teaching. That helped carry them steadfast in the Faith through secular high schools, on into public and private universities, and graduate schools. By your congregation's holding onto core Lutheran – that defines the Christian – doctrine, and providing excellent academic studies, your congregation bolstered them, and many others, in the Faith. Your first love was to Christ, and Him crucified, and that you taught faithfully during their years here.

That having been said, if you believe your Church and school roles to be other than that just described, if you think your greater responsibility is to the government and its education mandates, repent! Believe the Good News that Jesus died to bear your sins into the grave that you might have life in Him. Return your thoughts to giving back to God that which is God's. In particular, that means continuing to produce students who are first and foremost grounded in God's rightly divided Word.

It is also true, by God's grace, through His rightly proclaimed Word and properly administered Visible Word – the Sacraments – such biblically, confessionally and traditionally ordered ministries in our Circuit that find their roots at Faith Lutheran have flourished and borne much fruit in the Gospel. You continue to join with your sister congregations in this area as we proclaim the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins,

¹ *Matthew 22:21*

and His resurrection from the dead that declares the faithful right with the eternal Father. As you continue to walk together with us, you are fulfilling Jesus' exhortation to faithfulness. In the partnership that we share in the Good News of Jesus, you continue to be found giving back *the things of the God to the God*.

(To help emphasize the fruits of those truths, this evening I am vested in the manner of the officiant pastors of the LCMSU U of A campus ministry – clerical shirt, crucifix and stole. I will say a bit more about this later)....

The Lord's emphasis on rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's may be depicted visually through such simple images. Faithful pastors traditionally dress today in alb (white robe), stole and pectoral cross (among other vestments). Such garments are worn to remind all of us that we pastors are called to image the Office Christ established. The clothing that wraps our flesh gives honor to Christ in the Church in the midst of her public worship services. This is usually done that we all might hold in our minds the biblical truth that Christian worship is not intended to mirror civic, government, or business environments. Rather, it is that which informs the lives of its participants in that which God wills to use to influence and inform the worldly culture about us. This is a reflection of giving the things of God to God, while leaving the things of government to government.

Think about these parallels: the politician of our day wears the suit, or tie, in the color of his or her party. The businessman wears the accepted uniform of his or her industry or service. Sheriff's deputies wear their uniforms that they might be seen as "keeping the peace and serving the community since 1865." Thus it goes from vocation to vocation. Of the garments covering pastors in Christian public services, the stole is the clearest symbol of the Office of the Ministry. It is used to display to Christians that the man in front of them has been rightly and orderly called into the Office Jesus established.

It is the stole, worn in a worship environment, that informs its beholder that the man wearing it is approved by God through His Church to stand before His people and declare His Word. It is a yoke, unbound, that hangs as a reminder to the hearers of the

Word of God that God is in control of the vested preacher's proclamation. Apart from asking to see a fellow's ordination and installation paperwork, you should be assured that a strip of cloth such as this should indicate to you that this is the guy Christ wants in front of you to declare His Word.

(This evening, to recognize and honor your congregation's Operation Barnabas Chapter and their work among you and our community, am wearing a special symbol of Office. Instead of my ordinary Green Pentecost stole, I am wearing the military stole with which I was yoked as I ministered to members of the Armed Forces and civilian support people in Iraq, in Kuwait, in Washington and in Arizona).

Articles of churchly clothing may actually serve to remind us that we are all called here by God to be found faithful in giving back *the things of the God to the God*. If you think not, check your thoughts against Scriptures' descriptions of the raiments of prophets and other leaders of the Faith as they are described in the Word of God. Repent! Believe the Gospel freedom Christ died to grant to us. Rejoice in the helpful New Covenant traditions that have been faithfully handed down, and help tie the worship of Christian generations together!

Think about this reality: before the traditional clothing of the New Covenant era was regularly seen covering Christian pastors, they had received an image to imitate. Remember that Jesus followed the public service order of that era – the liturgy – when He stood to read and sat to teach.² The Scriptures tell us there was nothing in His appearance to attract people to Himself.³ Even non-Jews referred to Him as Rabbi and Teacher, apparently without any indication that they beforehand had heard His teaching.⁴ Jesus could apparently have been easily identified by wearing the vestments of the teaching Office.⁵ Jesus would likely have been vested as a Rabbi and Teacher of the Israelites of His era. It was His Word, coupled with His miracles along with the way He

² c.f. *Luke* 14:16–30; *Mark* 6:1 ff; etc.

³ *Isaiah* 53:2-3.

⁴ c.f. *Luke* 8:26–28; *John* 1:35–38, 47–49; 4:7–9

⁵ *Matthew* 17: 1-2; 27:28–29, 31, 35; *Mark* 15:17–20, 24; *Luke* 23:11; *John* 19:2-3, 23-25a.

visually bore on His Person His Office that drew people to Him. He actually carried in Himself the reality of His words:

“All of you give back from the things of Caesar to Caesar; and the things of the God to the God.”⁶

Reflect on this image: as the end of Jesus’ time of teaching drew near – as it was when today’s narrative took place – He put off all His earthly vestments. Clothed only in His very human flesh, He ascended to the glory of the Cross. There, bearing the sins of the whole world, carrying your sins on His sinless Person, He died, naked, alone, forsaken of the Father, to free you from all your trespasses against His Holy Word. He gave to Caesar his due – the life demanded for sins Jesus did not commit. He gave God His due – His death for your death, His life for your life. He gave those gifts to you as God washed you into His death and resurrection with the water and Word of Holy Baptism. We return our thoughts again to our theme verse:

[Jesus] said to them, “All of you give back from the things of Caesar to Caesar; and the things of the God to the God.”⁷

Jesus’ concluding words for the day come to us as the end of the Church Year draws near. The weeks from September 29 until the last three weeks of the Church Year are annually given to us that we might remember the endurance of the faithful in the Church on earth.⁸ That is, in part, why today’s readings remind us that those whom God has chosen, you who are clothed in Christ, are those who remain in His Word and Sacraments until your last day. It is annually comforting to hear that we are *brothers having been beloved by [the] God, the One choosing you all.*⁹

That having been said, the Church’s long, green season is soon to be punctuated with reds that teach of the martyrdom of the faithful, and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and sprinkled with the whites that remind us of Christ, and those who have fallen asleep in Him. In a week, here, Circuit pastors will be vested, clothed not in the raiment

⁶ Matthew 22:21

⁷ Matthew 22:21.

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:4.

of government or business, but in the coverings that image Christ and the saints. You are to see them as God's gifts to His Church. They are the men called to preach, teach and administer His Sacraments that bring forgiveness, life and salvation to their hearers. We pray that will remind you of Jesus' teaching for today:

*"All of you give back from the things of Caesar to Caesar; and the things of the God to the God."*¹⁰

With that encouragement, dear ones in Christ, God is preparing you through His Word to hear of yourselves in the readings over the next several weeks. To that end, today, let us dive a bit more into this day's text. Its teaching begins just after Jesus has declared that *many are called, but few are chosen*.¹¹ Jesus had entered Jerusalem in triumph. He had cleared the Temple of the convenient moneychangers and sellers of sacrificial animals. His authority to teach had been challenged by the religious leaders. He had taught parables which convicted the Chief Priests and Pharisees. They had intensified their plotting to kill Jesus. That led to the great students and teachers of the Law – the most highly trained laymen of that era of the Church – counseling together *in order that Him they may have ensnared in [His] word*.¹²

That is the way of the world, and it is a way that infects the Church in every generation. Whenever a preacher of the Good News comes along proclaiming freedom for sinners apart from the works of the Law, there will be those who plot against him. That should not be any surprise, for that which they did to Jesus, they also do in time to His faithful followers. There are those who oppose faithful pastors in every generation.

Such faithful men are recognized as those who continue to call people to hear God's Word rightly and to receive His gifts according to His Word. Such faithful ones are those who call sin, sin, sinners to repentance, and who declare that salvation and being declared right with God are the free gifts of God. Such men of the Faith, in each generation of the New Covenant era, are called to stand in the stead of Christ.

¹⁰ Matthew 22:21

¹¹ Matthew 22:14.

¹² Matthew 22:15.

Like Christ, they are opposed by those who have devised for themselves other means to attain salvation, and justification and sanctification. Those scoundrels in each Church age believe and teach that they give their worship to God first, and that He responds then to them. They actually, as the Pharisees of old, believe they can offer to God things that God needs! They even deceive others into following their ways, as we hear as our text continues:

Then they sent to Him from the disciples of them, along with the Herodians, saying, "O Teacher, we know that true You remain, and the Way of the God in truth You teach, and it does not remain (a) concern to You about anyone; for You do not look into (the) face of men. You must say then to us, what do You think: is it proper to give poll-tax to Caesar or not?"¹³

The Pharisees, in all their order's four century or so history, only numbered about 1,800 men. Those fellows knew Scripture back to front, inside and out. It was they, in their desire to trap Jesus in His teaching that they might have capital charges to lay against Him, who sent their disciples to Jesus along with a group of apparent supporters of the Herodian kings. Such were unlikely co-conspirators, except when we recall the old adage, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

They begin their hunt for a weakness in Jesus' teaching with words of flattery. They actually spoke the truth, for they declared that Jesus is sincere, and He truly taught the Way of truth—even though they, at that time, actually rejected His teaching. They saw that He was not a meek teacher who accepted everyone and corrected no one. They indicated that He was no respecter of persons. Jesus corrected kings and priests and religious leaders and canon lawyers and anyone in error.

They ask him a question that they had obviously spent a lot of time devising. They apparently think that no matter how Jesus answers, they have Him trapped. If Jesus answers that the poll-tax should not be paid, He could be numbered with the zealot part. They could then take Him to Roman authorities with charges of supporting terrorist ideology. If He says the poll-tax should be paid, He offends the devout Jews. They did

¹³ Matthew 22:16-17.

not want to handle the coin. You see, they bore the graven image of Caesar – forbidden in their interpretation of the First Table of the Law – with the words, “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus.” The tax was paid in coinage that declared Caesar the son of a god.

Jesus was apparently trapped. But, He was, is, and ever shall be the Son of the God. His response catches them in their evil. He who had taught His disciples to pray, “deliver us from evil,” when faced with that same word applied to Him in the thinking of His enemies, delivers them into their own evil. Jesus, the Jesus of the Scripture, calls out those who would tempt or test Him (that is the same root word that is used in the Our Father as we pray, “lead us not into temptation”).

Jesus corrects His tempters, calling them, “hypocrites.” (He was definitely not a pop-Christian Jesus). In the meaning that word carried that day, Jesus was calling them, “two-faced.” Please understand that hypocrite was the term used for play actors. They were humans acting under masks as various stage characters.

Jesus declares that He beholds the true persons behind the masks of flattery and supposed truth seeking. Just so He does to you, when you approach Him to give Him anything – any word, or thought, or praise, or action – that is designed to compel Him to violate His will that His Word be the means for salvation for all who hear. Having called them to produce the coin, He declares to them the theme text chosen for this place, for this weekend.

He said to them, “All of you give back from the things of Caesar to Caesar; and the things of the God to the God.”¹⁴

Following that, those who tested the true Son of God, *having heard, they marveled, and forsaking Him, they went forth.*¹⁵ For you who hear, mark, understand and respond to Jesus’ Word, that is Good News. You know the truth, for you have not forsaken Him. You believe that whenever we say back to God His Word – as we do in the Divine

¹⁴ Matthew 22:21

¹⁵ Matthew 22:22

Liturgies of the Church – we are being found faithful to Jesus’ teaching. He gives, we receive, then we respond, and it is all from Him. We confess that true Christian worship begins and ends with God, His Word, His action and His Work in and through us.

That having been declared, I bless you in Christ, in thanksgiving for that which God has done through you as you have continued in His Word. I look forward in hopeful anticipation of that which Christ will do through you as you learn from Pastor Cockran’s continuing studies and teaching of God’s Word among you. I pray that God will, through the Jesus of the Scripture, help you reclaim many treasures of the Faith. We pray that you will always remember your first love – Christ and Him crucified. In Him, may you be continually found giving back the things of the God to the God.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Pentecost XX (*LSB* Three-year series, A (Proper 24))

Psalm 96:1-9 (10-13); Isaiah 45:1-7; I Thessalonians 1: 1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria