

# Morning Worship for 18 October 2020

From the United Reformed Church in Morpeth,  
Widdrington & Gt. Bavington

## Opening Words

Let the name of the Lord be blessed:  
from this time forward and forever.  
From the rising of the sun to its going down:  
let the name of the Lord be praised.  
The Lord is exalted over all the nations:  
and his glory is above the heavens.  
*Psalm 113:2-4*

## Hymn: 67 Immortal Invisible

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessèd, most glorious, the ancient of days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above  
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
And wither and perish-but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee,  
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,  
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.

*W. Chalmers Smith*

## Prayer of Approach

God of Moses,  
you showed your glory to Moses  
when he met with you  
in the tent of your presence.

And in your glory,  
Moses was so transformed,  
that when he left that place,  
his face shone with that same glory.

We thank you God  
that you have shown to us your glory  
in the face of your Son, Jesus Christ.  
As we come to worship today,  
we come to be in your presence,  
we come to look upon our Lord Jesus,  
and to hear you speaking into our lives.

Help us as we worship  
to turn away from our doubts and uncertainties for  
our future,  
to turn away from the anxieties and stresses of our  
present,  
and to turn away from the regrets and errors of our  
past.

Father forgive us we pray,  
so that we may meet here with you,  
and be transformed by your glory,  
and so follow you in our daily life  
so that we may reflect your glory  
and shine with the light of Christ.  
AMEN

**Readings: Exodus 33:12-23**

**Reading: Matthew 22:15-22**

## Reflection on Coins

### Hymn: 371 Take my life and let it be

Take my life and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
Take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise,

Take my hands and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee,

Take my voice and let me sing  
always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips and let them be  
filled with messages from thee,

Take my silver and my gold;  
not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect and use  
every power as thou shalt choose,

Take my will and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne,

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee,

*Frances Ridley Havergal*

## Sermon

***There is a story of a little boy who wanted £100 badly and prayed for one whole week that God would give him this £100, but nothing happened. So then he decided to write a letter to God requesting this £100. When the post office received a letter addressed to God UK, they decided to send it to the prime minister.***

***The prime minister was so impressed, touched and amused that he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a £5 note. The Prime Minister thought that this would appear to be a lot of money for the little boy.***

***The boy was delighted with the £5 and sat down to write a thank you note to God which read***

***“Dear God.  
Thank you so much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through 10 Downing Street, and as usual, they took most of it.”***

Today's reading from Matthew's gospel is a passage where Jesus is questioned about paying taxes, and whether it is right for the Government of that time to take more than their fair share of the money earned by those who are poor. And so today we are going to reflect for a moment on that passage, on what Jesus says, and what Jesus might mean, and how that might affect us today.

For those of you who are still earning an income and need to submit tax returns you will no doubt be aware that the deadline for submitting your tax return is just under 2 weeks time. That's for paper returns, and if you don't submit your return by then, you can be fined. Or if you submit your return online, you have a bit longer to get things in place.

Previous to this online capability, Her Majesty Revenue and Customs published some of the excuses made by people for late submission of their tax returns:

1. My pet goldfish died (self-employed builder)
2. I had a run-in with a cow (Midlands farmer)
3. After seeing a volcanic eruption on the news, I couldn't concentrate on anything else (London woman)
4. My wife won't give me my mail (self-employed trader)
5. My husband told me the deadline was 31 March, and I believed him (Leicester hairdresser)
6. I've been far too busy touring the country with my one-man play (Coventry writer)

7. My bad back means I can't go upstairs. That's where my tax return is (a working taxi driver)
8. I've been cruising round the world in my yacht, and only picking up post when I'm on dry land (South East man)
9. Our business doesn't really do anything (Kent financial services firm)
10. I've been too busy submitting my clients' tax returns (London accountant).

Its quite interesting today when we read the gospel passage that we find a discussion around paying taxes, and the people trying to make excuses for not having to pay their tax – and of course hoping at the same time they might trick Jesus into blaspheming and giving them cause to arrest him.

I must admit that like many other people, I do at times resent paying tax. Sometimes I look at my payslip, and I see all the money that I could have had, and resent losing that percentage of my monthly money. But of course, at other times, when I am feeling more rational, I can see the bigger picture of all that that money is used for that I have given back into the system.

And of course, sometimes it really riles me when I hear of others who find loopholes in the system or blatantly ignore paying any tax. Either because they don't believe in it or they needed the money to buy a house or a new car or more generally, they just felt entitled not to pay their share. There is an obligation for all to pay that are able to, so why shouldn't they?

We heard earlier some of the excuses as to why people don't pay tax of some sort. Many of us would love to rationalize our way out of this civic obligation; if they didn't make us pay it, we wouldn't.

But whatever you think about the fairness of our current taxation system though, first-century residents of Judea certainly had much more reason to gripe. An occupying army of Roman soldiers had invaded the country with much bloodshed and cultural upheaval, and taxes were not paid to demonstrate good citizenship so much as to stay alive. Pay up or we'll kill you or members of your family.

And so, in Matthew 22, some Pharisees lay out a trap by asking Jesus whether it is right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar.

This is a good trap. If Jesus says no, he risks joining the long line of those who have been killed standing up against Roman rule. If Jesus says yes, he risks joining the long line of impotent prophets with little to offer a

proud people who are being oppressed under the occupation.

Either way, the Pharisees know, the power of Jesus will be deflated once they spin his “no” to the Romans or his “yes” to the Jews.

This leads us to verse 18: “But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ And Jesus tells them to pay to Ceasar what belongs to Ceasar. At a simple level Jesus’ answer is simply that they should pay the tax required by Ceasar, even if Ceasar is corrupt – even if the money isn’t going to make it to Ceasar because that corruption is multi-layered.

But we have to be careful, because when we read that passage today we naturally assume that Ceasar for us is the Inland Revenue. Or the government in general. But I don’t think that is actually a very good comparison, because no matter what our political persuasion, our system of taxation is there to provide for society in general and especially for those who are less well off.

A better comparison is to compare Ceasar to being something rather less beneficial to our society. In America today, Ceasar’s Palace is actually in Las Vegas. And that helps us understand a lot more about the resentment to paying this tax, that wasn’t going to a fair system of government and that was going to help the whole of society in the long run.

What if the equivalent of paying off Ceasar Augustus is to turn over a percentage of your denarii to the extravagant, risky, flashy, sexist, silly lifestyle represented by what happens in Vegas. If that were the case, I’m sure you can see how even paying taxes to Vegas might be a more appropriate parallel with what some devout Jews thought of turning over their coins to Rome.

And still Jesus told them to do so.

The point is, however much you don’t like paying taxes, you still should do it, too. The alternative is not worth it: there is no need to get yourself locked up for not paying your Road Tax or sending in your tax return.

Unless, of course, for you its about doing whatever you can to hang on to a few more of your hard earned pound notes and that this is the most important issue of your life.

If that’s the case, then not only is the image of Ceasar on your money, it’s impinged on your heart as well. You are showing that you belong to a world in which sterling and denarii drive your decisions.

And that’s why, beyond the simple question of whether Christians should pay taxes, we need the second, more demanding half of Jesus’ instructions: “Give back to God what is God’s.”

Beyond a doubt, as surely as Ceasar’s image was stamped on the denarius, an image has been stamped on your life. It is the image of God, to whom you belong.

Since the first chapter of Genesis, when God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature.” We have been stamped with the image of God.

The image of a Roman Emperor on the coins used throughout the Empire was important because it spoke to people of power, prosperity and stability of the Roman Empire, even when the reality was perhaps somewhat different.

We too, in our daily lives, like to present an image of ourselves, an outward image that suggests we are successful, content, well to do.

But our true image, our true identity, is that we are women and men created in the image of God. Image is important – not an image created by what we wear, or what we have, but that image of God that should shine through our words and our actions.

The opening chapter of John’s gospel reminds us that the glory of God was in the person of Jesus Christ; “the Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory – the glory of the only Son and of the Father, full of grace and truth”

It was that glory that Moses looked upon when God walked past in the Old Testament reading today, and later on when Moses comes down from the Mountain, having been in the presence of this glory, we are told that “he was not aware that this face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.”

We as a people bear God’s image, as individuals and together as a church - That glory is with us and about us – and is seen whenever we give back to God what belongs to God.

Whenever we return a kindness for kindness, whenever we bow down to worship, whenever we

seek justice and peace – we return to God what is his,  
and his glory shines.

Our prayer should be that when others look to us, as  
individuals and as churches in this community, they  
should be able to see that image, that image of God  
imprinted on us, and God can be glorified.

Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
may we as individuals and as a church today  
hear the message that you have brought to us today,  
that we may not be swayed from our purpose and  
calling  
by the trivial things of this world.  
But we pray, that we may increasingly know  
that you alone we can depend for all things.

We pray today for all those emperors, monarchs and  
leaders of government  
that you may give to them all graciousness and  
integrity.

We pray that all in power and authority may  
undertake their duties  
in a spirit of humility  
so that the oppressed may find a voice  
and all may work together for the common good.

We pray for our homes and workplaces  
and ask that you may bless them with harmony and  
peace;  
give us grace to respect one another  
in the way we talk and act and think  
so that your glory may be reflected in us.

We pray you speak peace into the hearts  
of all those who are agitated, anxious or confused at  
this time.

Lay your healing hands on all who are ill  
and let them know the reassurance of your love.

We pray for all those who died, and have entered  
your kingdom,  
and who may now lay down their burdens.  
May they rest in peace forever.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
the whole of creation sings your praise  
and we give voice to it now  
as we offer the song of our lives  
rededicated to the work of your kingdom,

Accept these prayers as we say together the words  
you taught us..

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Hymn: 657 Rejoice the Lord is King**

Rejoice, the Lord is King:  
Your Lord and King adore!  
Rejoice, give thanks and sing,  
And triumph evermore.

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Jesus, the Saviour, reigns,  
The God of truth and love;  
When He has purged our stains,  
He took his seat above;

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

His kingdom cannot fail,  
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;  
The keys of death and hell  
Are to our Jesus giv'n:

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

He sits at God's right hand  
till all his foes submit  
and bow to his command  
and fall beneath his feet.

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice!  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Rejoice in glorious hope!  
Jesus the judge shall come  
And take His servants up  
To their eternal home:

*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice  
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!*

Charles Wesley

**Blessing,**