

20th Sunday after Pentecost October 18, 2020

19th Sunday after Trinity Proper 24 (29)
Lectionary Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

Living the Lutheran Lectionary

A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.

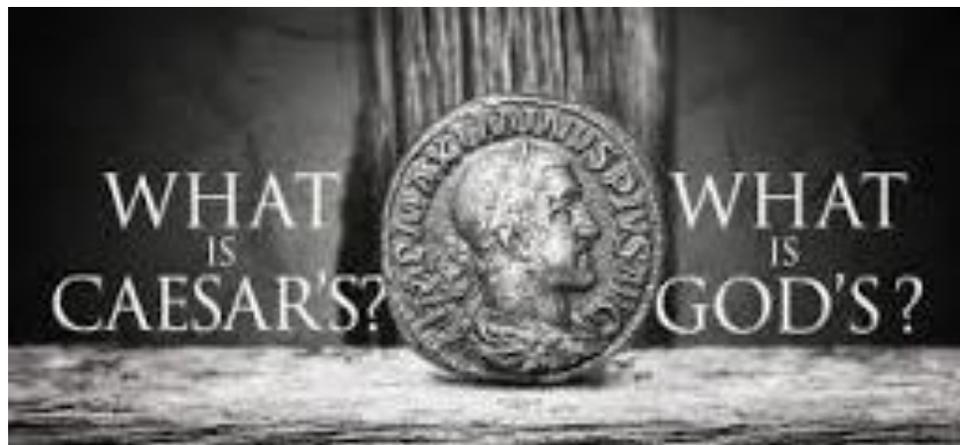
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.

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- ✦ www.bethlehemlutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies
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<https://pastorsblog.com.au/2017/10/22/what-are-the-things-of-god-matthew-2215-22/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 904 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 250
“Holy God, we praise Thy name”

“Christians have been singing the hymn Te Deum laudamus (Latin for “We Praise You, O God”) for many centuries. Legend attributes it to St. Ambrose and St. Augustine on the occasion of the latter’s Baptism (in AD 387). It is said that they improvised it, each man contributing a line at a time. Its true origin remains obscure, but modern scholarship puts its composition in the fifth century. Later the text was expanded by adding two more stanzas to the end. The Te Deum is commonly sung during the morning service called “Matins” (see LSB, p. 223), where its function is somewhat like a creed. The hymn “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” is a version of the Te Deum; rather than being in chant form like the original, it is set as a typical hymn, with rhymes and a regular meter (see LSB 941 for another example). Like the creeds, this hymn makes a statement of faith. When we sing it, we are singing what we believe about God...

We have in this hymn all the imagery of the throne of heaven and its attributes. The angels, apostles, prophets and martyrs are singing in “unceasing chorus” (st. 2); we are invited to join this throng in their song of praise...” study by Randall P. Wurschmidt

- <https://www.lcms.org/worship/hymn-of-the-day-studies>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqtt0R0elhQ> Plymouth Choir and Congregation of First-Plymouth Church, Lincoln Nebraska...accompanied by the Plymouth Brass and Organist Christopher Marks. **Mahima Chhinchani** – “Such a wonderful and heavenly the impact of brass and overall harmony, organ, choir ,drum so blessed the entire congregation is, praise to the everlasting king of king ...Lord Jesus Christ”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM3pwL4 HDg> “Music ministers who use contemporary music don't want to leave traditional hymns behind. Watch, hear and learn a new arrangement of the beloved hymn "Holy God We Praise Thy Name " on The Commons. "Holy God We Praise Thy Name" is used very commonly as a song at the end of a Roman Catholic benediction service during the reposition of the Eucharist after a period of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.” Song begins at 7 minute 45 second mark.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXwpNB1pJsE> Stephen Tharp plays...at Saint Patrick Cathedral in NYC. The rattling noise heard in the background is the Cathedral floors being swept.

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001
by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

O. T. - “I am the LORD, and there is no other”

Psalm – “sing to the LORD ”

Epistle – “you became imitators of us and of the Lord”

Gospel – “But Jesus, aware of their malice, said...”

Isaiah 45:1-7; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), Exodus 33:12-23 or Isaiah 45:1-7 (Next week: Reformation Day Observed, Revelation 14:6-7; RCL, Deuteronomy 34:1-12 or Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18)

The name Cyrus won't ring a bell for many worshipers... Preachers are likely to strike a chord, however, if they announce that this Cyrus is the Lord's Messiah (Hebrew for "anointed one" = "Christ" in Greek), which is precisely what Isaiah 45:1 calls the Persian ruler who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. Cyrus's messianic status should give us pause, if not surprise and offense. Two thousand years of Christian history have solidified the connection of the name Jesus with title Christ, and rightly so, for that is what Jesus is: God's anointed one.

It is also likely that the first recipients of the royal oracle in Isaiah 45:1-7 -- exiled Jews living in Babylon -- would have been stunned to hear the prophet say such a thing. While the term messiah (māšîaḥ) is not abundant in the Old Testament, occurring about thirty five times, the remnant of Judah would have associated "messiah" almost exclusively with their own king from the house of David. How could that office be assumed by a foreign conqueror? So what are we to do with Cyrus, the only non-Israelite leader to be called a messiah?

The role of Cyrus in God's plan for Israel opens a door to theological and pastoral insights in this Sunday's Old Testament lection. It is theological, first and foremost, because the biblical passages in which Cyrus appears are not really about him but about Yahweh and his special plans for Israel's redemption. The larger literary unit of which our passage is a part (Isa 44:24-45:13) is a virtual litany of God's attributes and actions. As evidence of this preoccupation with God, one scholar points to "the repeated first person pronoun in Yahweh's speech (nine times) and the verbs in the first person," which total over thirty instances.² In contrast, Cyrus is mentioned by name only twice in the Hebrew (44:28; 45:1) and all of his actions are prompted by God's prior influence in his life. Cyrus succeeds only at the behest of the One whom he does not know..."

➤ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=164

[James K. Mead](#) Associate Professor of Religion, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA

Cyrus, God's Instrument Verses 1-13

45 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,

whose right hand **I have grasped**,

to subdue nations before him

and to loose the belts of kings,

to open doors before him

that gates may not be closed:

² **"I will go** before you

and level the exalted places,^[a]

I will break in pieces the doors of bronze

and cut through the bars of iron,

3 I will give you the treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is **I**, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

4 For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.

5 I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.

7 I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create calamity;
I am the LORD, who does all these things...

The LORD, the Only Savior Verses 14-25

- a. [Isaiah 45:2](#) Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint *level the mountains*
- b. [Isaiah 45:11](#) A slight emendation yields *will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?*
- c. [Isaiah 45:19](#) Hebrew *in emptiness*
- d. [Isaiah 45:23](#) Septuagint *every tongue shall confess to God*

“Can a community of faith benefit from a champion who does not even know God?

What happens when all the certainties that seemed to hold life together are shattered? When the divine promises that we thought were our birthright no longer hold true? Isaiah 45:1-7 wrestles with those questions in surprising ways.

In its background lies Judah’s half-century of exile after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Readers encounter the devastation of that period in texts like Lamentations, which describes burning, starvation, slaughter, and rape, and asks God, “Why have you forgotten us completely?” (Lamentations 5:20). The heirs of the Davidic dynasty, who had ruled for nearly four centuries, were snuffed out (2 Kings 25:7) or kept under close watch in the Babylonian court (2 Kings 25:27-30). The end of the third book of the Psalter reflects on the seeming failure of the dynastic promises: “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (Psalm 89:49).

There are three reasons given for the Lord’s extravagance towards Cyrus. First, it is “so that [he] may know” that the Lord is the agent of his success (45:3b). Second, in a parallel

construction, it is also “for the sake of my servant Jacob” (45:4a). Third, it is “so that they (meaning, people everywhere) may know that there is none besides me” (verse 6). The merisms* formed by the pairings east-west, light-darkness, and weal-woe (verses 6-7) emphasize the completeness of the Lord’s power...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4614
[Christopher B. Hays](#) D. Wilson Moore Associate Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.

“Merism (Latin merismus, Greek μερισμός merismós) is a linguistic phenomenon in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole. For example, in order to say that someone "searched everywhere", one could use the merism "searched high and low". Merisms are common in the Old Testament. For example, in Genesis 1:1, when God creates את השמים ואת הארץ (Modern pronunciation: et hashamaim ve-et haarets) "the heavens and the earth" (New Revised Standard Version), the two parts (heavens and earth) do not refer only to the heavens and the earth. Rather, they refer to the heavens, the earth and everything between them, i.e. God created the entire world, the whole universe.[1]:10 Other famous examples of Biblical merisms are Genesis 1:5, where “evening” and “morning” refer to “one day” (including noon, afternoon etc.); and Psalm 139, where the psalmist declares that God knows “my downsitng and my uprising”, i.e. God knows all the psalmist’s actions. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merism>

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"I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

Strong words! But are they good news or bad news? It's clear, I think... this announcement is meant as good news -- but it will take some work for us and our hearers to determine how and why this is true.

This is an important text ...It actually runs from 44:24 through 45:8, and it seems to mark the center of this section of the book (chapters 40-55). Note how its significance is emphasized by a hymnic inclusio ("Sing, O heavens," in 44:23; "Shower, O heavens," in 45:8).

The hymns surround two parallel "Thus says the Lord" passages (44:24-28 and 45:1-7), of which the second is our text. This structural context is important, not only because it marks the grandeur of the text, but also because it points quite clearly to what God is up to in Cyrus. The first half of the "Thus says the Lord" parallelism (44:24-28) is nothing more than a lengthy and powerful self-introduction of Yahweh, needed perhaps to set up the incredible claims of 45:1-7. Because "I am the Lord who..." (44:24-28), I can do this remarkable Cyrus thing (45:1-7) -- even if you Israelites might think it's not the way for a proper God to act (deliverance through a "heathen"?!), which seems to be the implied objection to which God responds with the "woe" warnings that immediately follow our text (45:9-13)...

Isaiah's good news might be paraphrased thus: "Whom would you rather have in charge of even the dark realities of the real world: gods created by human hands and human culture (including those we create today), or the God who loves you and who will give himself to you and for you in whatever way it takes to set you free?" ...

There is only one God, but that God works through the forces of creation and through the agency of human beings (like Cyrus). Because they are real, both God's natural world and God's human world might revert to the chaos God seeks to overcome though God's continual work of liberation, but liberation and redemption remain always God's "purpose." Sometimes getting to

God's goal will entail "woe" and "darkness" (not least, the woe and darkness of Good Friday) but "weal" and "light" remain the goal (not least, the light of Easter's dawn).

On a Sunday when the Gospel reading includes the "render unto Caesar" line (Matthew 22:21), our text reminds us that God has worked and will work through "Caesar" (or Cyrus). Whether or however we talk about God's "two kingdoms," that can never mean there is one "kingdom" where God rules (church) and one that God leaves to Caesar (politics)..."

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1003
[Fred Gaiser](#) Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

Psalm 96:1-9 (10-13); RCL, Psalm 99 or Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13) (Psalm 46; RCL, Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 or Psalm 1)

This psalm is also the one for Proper 4 in Year C.

"This Psalm is evidently taken from that sacred song which was composed by David at the time when "the ark of God was set in the midst of the tent which David had prepared for it, and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God." See the sixteenth chapter of the first book of the Chronicles. The former part of that sacred song was probably omitted in this place because it referred to Israel, and the design of the Holy Ghost in this psalm was to give forth a song for the Gentiles, a triumphant hymn wherewith to celebrate the conversion of the nations to Jehovah in gospel times. It follows fitly upon the last Psalm, which describes the obstinacy of Israel, and the consequent taking of the gospel from them that it might be preached among the nations who would receive it, and in due time be fully won to Christ by its power. It thus makes a pair with the Ninety-fifth Psalm. It is a grand MISSIONARY HYMN...

DIVISION. We will make none, for the song is one and indivisible, a garment of praise without seam, woven from the top throughout..."

- <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=spur&b=19&c=96>
[Charles H. Spurgeon's Treasury of David](#)

Worship in the Splendor of Holiness

96 Oh **sing to the LORD** a new song;

sing to the LORD, all the earth!

² **Sing to the LORD, bless his name;**

tell of his salvation from day to day.

³ **Declare his glory** among the nations,

his marvelous works among all the peoples!

⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,

but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him;
 strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷ **Ascribe to the LORD**, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

⁸ **Ascribe to the LORD** the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and **come into his courts!**

⁹ **Worship the LORD** in the splendor of holiness;^[a]
tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰ *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!
 Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
 he will judge the peoples with equity."*

¹¹ *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
 let the sea roar, and all that fills it;*

¹² *let the field exult, and everything in it!
 Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy*

¹³ *before the LORD, for he comes,
 for he comes to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world in righteousness,
 and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

a. [Psalm 96:9](#) Or *in holy attire*

"Psalms 96-99 form a set of four hymns of praise. They belong together by virtue of their genre, the way they have been structured, and their content. In particular, Psalms 96 and 98 go together while Psalms 97 and 99 show a close relationship.

Psalms 96 and 98 each begin by calling the people to 'sing to the LORD a new song' (96:1; 98:1). The reason for the summons in the case of Ps. 96:4-6 is the greatness of Yahweh the creator above all other gods who are but idols. In Ps. 98:1b-3 it is because Yahweh has remembered his steadfast love and made his victory known. In each case, the initial calls are followed by a longer summons for all creation to praise Yahweh (Ps. 96:7-13a; 98:4-9a), together with a second reason for praise, 'for he is coming to judge the earth' (96:13; 98:9). These songs of praise follow the usual pattern in psalms of praise of a call to praise followed by a reason for that praise. There is no praise without its corresponding reason. Praise of God is a rational thing to do.

The unrestrained praise of Psalms 96 and 98 is interspersed with the measured praise of Yahweh in Psalms 97 and 99. Each begins with the statement Yahweh?malak ('Yahweh reigns' or 'Yahweh has become king'). This is followed by reference to Zion (97:8; 99:2) and focus on Yahweh's holiness, especially in Psalm 99 (97:12b; 99:3, 5, 9).

When read in sequence these four psalms form a progression. From general praise for Yahweh as creator who is coming (Psalm 96), we see him coming in clouds with fire etc. in Psalm 97. In Psalm 98 praise is summoned after Yahweh's victory as he prepares to judge the people which Psalm 99 declares him to have done. In Psalm 99 Moses, Aaron and Samuel stand as witnesses to those who have called on Yahweh's name and whom he has answered (v. 8). The praise in this sequence echoes that earlier in Psalm 93 (cf. Ps. 96:10 with 93:1)...

- <http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/ChristmasC/ChristmasPsalms.html>
Rev'd Dr. Howard Wallace, Minister in the Uniting Church in Australia

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“What makes Psalm 96 (and some of the other enthronement Psalms) so remarkable is that it is addressed not to Israel, but to the nations. The very people who have carried Israel into Exile are here called to recognize that Yahweh reigns. Indeed, the call of Psalm 96 is not just to recognize, but to “sing, sing, sing, proclaim, declare, and ascribe to the Lord glory due his name.” That call goes out to “all the earth, the nations, all peoples, families of the earth.” No one is exempt from those imperatives. No one is left out; all are included in the call that was usually reserved for the covenant people of Israel.

There is a new song to sing—not a new melody with fresh lyrics, but a new work of God that has brought a new epoch in the history of Israel and the world. The nations are not called to sing a new tune, but to sing of a new time. “Proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.” It sounds as though this new thing that God will do for Israel will also benefit the whole world. That is, indeed, the claim in verses 10-13.

But there is also this business of the other gods that are worshiped by the nations of the world. The Psalmist will have no truck with them. The reason the nations are to praise Yahweh is that he is great and worthy of praise, contrary to those other gods. Yahweh is to be feared above all gods. That's not just because he is bigger and better, though he is. That would be an offensive enough claim to the nations. But the Psalmist goes on to claim, with the entire Old and New Testaments, that those other gods are nothing at all. They are idols, mere creations of human minds and hands. There is nothing beyond the image—just vanity, emptiness, futility. As I Kings 18 says of Baal, “there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention,” because Baal and all other gods do not exist beyond the idol. Yahweh, on the hand, “made the heavens” where the gods are alleged to dwell...”

- https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-4c/?type=the_lectionary_psalms Stan Mast

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; RCL, the same reading (Romans 3:19-28; RCL, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8)

“These words are very old. Ancient. Scholars differ on most everything, of course, but it is possible that 1 Thessalonians was the first of Paul's epistles. And since we are quite certain that the writing of the epistles pre-dates the writing down of the Gospels by a good bit of time, it is fully possible that 1 Thessalonians constitutes the earliest document ever written in this world following the ministry of Jesus Christ. In other words, this may be the first bit of Christian writing and theological reflection ever. If so, then these words in the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians are not only very old but very, very remarkable...”

...but one thing that for sure ought to give one pause is 1 Thessalonians 1. Contained in these ten verses is a breathtaking look at what Christians professed, believed, and proclaimed

already in the earliest years after the ministry of Jesus. Let's just make a list of what is overtly or tacitly asserted or claimed in these verses:

— *The Trinity: There are clear references here to God the Father, Jesus Christ the Lord, and the Holy Spirit.*

— *The idea that the gathering of God's people form the church and that this church is founded upon the Good News that just is the Gospel.*

— *A theology of the Holy Spirit who is the active agent in the era of the church, the one who inspires faith through the preaching of the Word and who then promotes joy in the hearts of believers.*

— *Some notion of divine election, of God's choosing those who will be the ones most receptive to receiving the Word of God.*

— *The doctrine of the resurrection and how it was the power of God the Father that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.*

— *Thoughts on the parousia, the second coming of Christ (which will figure prominently later in this epistle as well). Jesus is coming again in power, and Paul assures the Thessalonians of this.*

If this is one of the—if not THEE—most ancient of first century Christian writings, then how remarkable to see how much had developed theologically already in those early days..."

https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-24a/?type=lectionary_epistle Scott

Hoezee

Greeting Verse 1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example Verses 2-10

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly^[a] mentioning you in our prayers, **3** remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. **4** For we know, brothers^[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5** because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. **6** And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, **7** so that you became an example to all the believers in

Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

- a. [1 Thessalonians 1:2](#) Or *without ceasing*
- b. [1 Thessalonians 1:4](#) Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*

“The city of Thessalonica was founded in 316 BCE by Cassander, the King of Macedon and brother-in-law of Alexander the Great. The city was created on (or near) the site of an older settlement (Therme), but it is named for Cassander's wife, the half-sister of Alexander. She was given her name by her father, Phillip II of Macedon, to commemorate the fact that she was born on the day of his victory (Greek: nike) over the Thessalians. The new foundation included the ancient Therme as well as some 35 other small settlements.

Thessaloniki developed rapidly and as early as the 2nd century BC the first Hellenistic walls were built, forming a large square. It was, as all the other contemporary Greek cities, an autonomous part of the Macedon kingdom, with its own parliament (*Ekklesia tou Demou*, Assembly of the People) but the king was represented and could interfere in the city's domestic affairs. (Wikipedia)

In 146 BCE, Macedonia became a Roman province and Thessalonica was made the capital. As the center for Roman administration, the city prospered. It was later to side with Antony and Octavian in their successful struggle against the Republican forces at the battle of Philippi in 42 BCE...

Crossan and Reed suggest a population around 40,000 at the time of Paul, making Thessalonica one of the smaller provincial capitals within the Empire. Its natural advantages have hindered archaeological research. The city has been continuously occupied since its foundation in 316 BCE, allowing little opportunity for excavations...

An extensive introduction to Thessalonians and life in Thessalonica can be found at
http://wiki.faithfutures.org/index.php?title=Proper_31A

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“In the first section of the epistle proper (1:2–3:13), the personal and historical section), Paul and his missionary team [13](#) recall how the church was born (chapter 1), how it was nurtured (chapter 2), and how it was established more strongly in the faith (chapter 3). But in calling to mind the work at Thessalonica, the Apostle continued to express a heart of deep gratitude to the Lord for these Thessalonian believers (see 1:1; 2:13; 3:9).

What a powerful lesson there is here. Such an attitude of thanksgiving demonstrates Paul's ever present perspective of life and ministry—the perspective of grace. Though it was Paul and his associates who brought the message to these believers and labored among them, these men realized the fruit of their labors was ultimately the product of God's grace. If God Himself had not blessed their work, there would have been no converts and no church at Thessalonica. This is the perspective explained in [1 Corinthians 3:5-7...](#)"

- <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-commendation-and-thanksgiving-1-thess-12-10> FROM THE SERIES: [1 THESSALONIANS: AN EXEGETICAL AND DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY](#)

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1 THESSALONIANS 1:4-5. GOOD NEWS CAME TO YOU IN POWER

"We know, brothers loved (Greek: *agapao*) by God, that you are chosen" (Greek: *ekloge*) (v. 4). This verse assures the Thessalonian Christians that they are:

- Beloved (*agapao*) by God. The Greek word *agapao* indicates a joyful kind of love—the kind of love that takes delight in the beloved..

- Chosen (*ekloge*) by God. The Greek word *ekloge* is closely related to *eklektos*. Both words indicate being chosen or elected by God for a special purpose. In the first instance of election, God chose to enter into a covenant relationship with Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)—a covenant relationship later extended to the nation of Israel. The idea of election continues in the New Testament (John 15:16; 17:6; Ephesians 1:4; 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13), where God chooses certain people to be his people, to do his work, and to enjoy the blessings of salvation.

This doctrine of election might offend modern sensibilities, which resist the idea that some might be excluded from God's kingdom. However, I like the way that Charles Spurgeon dealt with it. He prayed, "Lord, save all the elect, and then elect some more."

- <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/1-thessalonians-11-10/> Copyright 2014, Richard Niell Donovan

Matthew 22: 15-22; RCL, the same reading (John 8:31-36 or Matthew 11:12-19; RCL, Matthew 22:34-36)

"Do you think that today's reading is about politics, or about taxes? It is about neither of these. It is about something much more important for each of us, it is about our relationships with the Triune God. About where our ultimate allegiance lies.

We read about the Pharisees and how they plotted against Jesus, trying to entangle Him in His words. They were clever. Clever indeed. The way they posed their question was well thought.

Remember, they all lived under the rule of the Roman Empire. From time to time there were rebellions and attempts to overthrow this oppressive power. Many of Jesus' contemporaries believed that their promised Savior, Messiah, will come as a political leader, who would free them from the Romans and would restore their own kingdom.

Now in this context the Pharisees asked their question. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" It is not a simple question. It is a loaded question. Whichever way Jesus answers it, the Pharisees would have caught Him.

If Jesus answers 'yes', then everyone would know that He is not the promised Savior, that He is not going to free Israel from Romans. That His allegiance lies with Rome. Then His popularity among the people would drop.

On the other hand, if Jesus answers 'no', then He has got into even greater trouble. Then the Pharisees could hand Him over to Romans with many witnesses affirming that He was inciting people to riot against the Caesar.

As we can see, the question was cleverly devised. But we also need to understand that this wasn't their real question. The Pharisees weren't concerned about taxes or politics. What they truly were concerned about was this Jesus.

Put it this way, Jesus was their problem. They didn't want Him, but they couldn't get rid of Him either. As we can see, they had the same problem that people have these days. What to do with this Jesus? What to do with the fact that He did things that no human being would be able to do? What to do with all His claims, that He has received all authority, all power in heaven and on earth? What to do with His command to follow Him and to keep His Commandments?..."

➤ <https://pastorsblog.com.au/2017/10/22/what-are-the-things-of-god-matthew-2215-22/>

Rev. Guntars Baikovs Grace Evangelical Lutherans in Tanunda, Australia

“The Holy Gospel beginning in the 22nd Chapter of St. Matthew”

The Parable of the Wedding Feast Verses 1-14

Paying Taxes to Caesar Verses 15-22 (Proper 24)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.^[a] ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, **“Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax.”** And they brought him a denarius.^[b] ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, **“Whose likeness and inscription is this?”** ²¹ They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, **“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”** ²² When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

- a. [Matthew 22:16](#) Greek for you do not look at people's faces
- b. [Matthew 22:19](#) A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer

Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection Verses 23-33
The Great Commandment Verses 34-40 (Proper 25)
Whose Son Is the Christ? Verses 41-46 (Proper 25 continued)

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“...Few Christians in North America can imagine serving a government that was openly idolatrous the way Rome was. Indeed, most scholars believe that the inscription on the coin to which Jesus refers in verse 20 was likely some blasphemous designation. Some scholars believe that the denarius in question likely bore the image of Tiberius with the inscription “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus” and an image of the “high priest” Livia on the coin’s obverse.

“In God We Trust” it wasn’t. Caesar was the official *Dominus et Deus*, “Lord and God” of the realm.

Yet Jesus calmly deflected questions about it all even as he held the coin in his own hand. He did not fling the coin away as though it were white-hot with paganism. He did not roll his eyes at the *unbelievable* fact that not everyone worship the God Jesus called Father. That alone is curious and just possibly instructive.

Jesus took this opportunity to convey some pretty profound theological truths after all. Because Rome at that time was all-powerful. Pax Romana covered most of the known world and the influence and almighty power of the Empire was all-but unchallenged...

But Jesus was able to see down to a deeper and more profound reality. When you know that the whole world belongs to God and when you know that above all the human heart is what belongs to the Creator God who fashioned us in his image, then even the big, bright, loud, and resplendent realities of this world become mere sideshows and distractions. But they do not ultimately touch God. They do not finally threaten God. Getting all excited about the powers that be and becoming hyper focused on them tempts us to downplay and underestimate the glorious sovereignty of God.

When Jesus takes the Caesar’s coin into his hand and holds it up in front of his bewildered questioners, you can almost see him shrug his shoulders, furrow his brow, and just generally convey the idea, “What are you talking about? THIS is all you have to ask me about? Who cares? This means nothing! Get a life! And remember that God is still ever and only God and that no human power can dislodge him, displace him, or challenge his claims on our hearts and on this world that belongs to him.”

As Jesus’ sermons go, this one may be brief, but it packs quite a wallop! And in a political age when so many people are so sharply divided along so many various cultural and social and economic fault lines, Jesus’ confident posture and consistent, laser-like focus on God both challenge us and call us back to our better selves.”

➤ https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-24a/?type=the_lectionary_gospel Scott Hoezee

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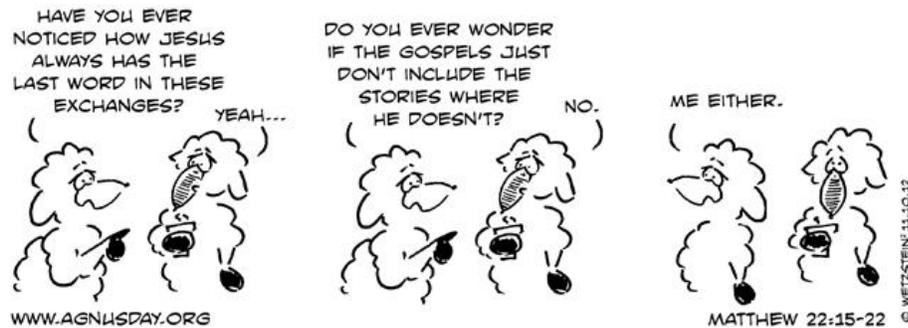
“...it’s easy to picture Jesus flipping that coin in his hand a few times, and then tossing it casually aside. In my imagination I see his eyes rising to meet those of his opponents,

confronting each of them with an unspoken question hanging in the air: “And you, my friend: Whose image do you bear?”...

Whatever we render unto Caesar, or to the retirement fund, or to the offering basket at church, we can never afford to forget this: we belong entirely to God. We may divide our budget, but we must never divide our allegiance. The coin of our realm bears the image of dead presidents, but each of us bears another. Our Emperor said: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” We must never forget to render unto God the things that are God’s.

➤ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2201 Lance Page

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➤ Angus Day appears with the permission of <https://www.agnusday.org/>

The Matthew Challenge

We are in the middle of chapter 22 - why not read the whole chapter in a single sitting?

Weekly review thoughts



“Notice that despite the fact that Jesus’ opponents carry a coin with a graven image and confession of Caesar’s divinity, Jesus accuses them of neither blasphemy nor disloyalty. Rather, he calls them *hypocrites*, those who have quite literally taken to wearing another, and false, likeness. So perhaps the charge against those trying to entrap or discount Jesus then or now is best understood as *amnesia*, for they have forgotten who they are, in whose likeness they were made. So the opportunity before us, Dear Partner, is to call people back to their primary identity as God’s children and stewards, as those made in the likeness of God and charged to act like the God we see in Jesus...”

➤ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/10/pentecost-20-a-image-likeness-and-identity/> David Lose