

Pentecost 21 10/18/20
Matthew 22:15-22 24A

“THEREFORE RENDER TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR’S, AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S.

I have a running joke with my brother-in-law, Tom, that he can never be president of the United States. That is because the Constitution sets forth two requirements for the president: (1) they be 35 years of age; and (2) they be a natural born US citizen. Well, Tom, is over 35 years of age, so that’s not the issue. It’s that last requirement that is an obstacle for Tom.

You see, there was no hospital in the town where they lived, so when the time came for him to be born, his parents drove to the nearest hospital - in Altona, Manitoba, Canada.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it became more than just a running joke. In the fall of 2002, Tom and his buddies went on their yearly fishing trip to Quebec. When they tried to re-enter the United States, the American authorities wouldn’t let him enter the US because ... he was a Canadian citizen, much to his surprise I should add. After all, he had a North Dakota driver’s license and had paid North Dakota and American taxes for years.

Eventually, he was allowed to re-enter the United States. And then, he had to set about getting the proper documents to prove that he was an American. Because he was born in Canada to American parents, he was a dual citizen of Canada and the United States. So, the day came he had to go to a federal courthouse and renounce his Canadian citizenship.

Dual citizens. That is what Jesus is teaching us that we are in our Gospel this Sunday.

After Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, his enemies did everything they could to show that He was wrong, that He was a sinner. They try to trap Him in our lesson by asking Him about paying taxes to the Romans. Who likes to pay taxes, right? So, if he said, “Yes,” the people would get disillusioned with Him. If He said, “No, don’t pay taxes to Rome,” they would report Him to the Roman government for treason.

Jesus was “aware of their malice;” He knew what was in their hearts. So, He asked them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” When they answered “Caesar’s,” He said to them, “Therefore give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and [give back to] God the things that are God’s”.

Jesus was teaching them that, whether they liked it or not, they were citizens of Rome. Therefore, they were to fulfill their responsibilities of citizenship. Give Caesar, the ruling civil authority, what is due him. And, then Jesus adds, that as a citizen of heaven, give God what is God's. As dual citizens, we live in two kingdoms, under two authorities, subject to both.

I. The challenge for us is we don’t like authority of any kind. Remember Adam and Eve in the Garden? They disobeyed God. They didn’t want anyone to have authority over them, not even the Lord their God. And by their disobedience, they brought sin and death upon us. And we show the death of our sin by continuing to rebel and challenge any and all authority.

We want to be in charge. You may as well shake your fist in the air when you say it, “No one is going to tell me what to do!” That’s why we run red lights; we lie on our taxes; we act up in class and disobey our teachers; and the cry in our streets today is to get rid of law enforcement officers – which is really something to consider when it’s your 80-year-old parent with dementia that’s missing or your home is being burglarized.

II. There has only been one person who ever walked on earth who perfectly obeyed God – His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ.

He rendered obedience to the divine Law which we should have rendered, but did not. He perfectly loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His mind; and He perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself. And the Good News of the Gospel is that God the Father credits His perfecting keeping of the Law to us. The Bible says it this way, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Ro 5:19).

And, because we did not perfectly love God and love our neighbor, Christ took upon Himself all those times we disobeyed those in authority over us, including God, and all our sin, He suffered and died for our sin, so that we are forgiven.

III. As Christians, we hold dual citizenship. We are citizens of an earthly kingdom -- for you and me, that means North Dakota and America -- and we are citizens of heaven by our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. As the dual citizens of two kingdoms, we have duties and responsibilities in both.

A. As citizens of heaven, we give back to God what is God’s. The words of Job are true of all of us, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return” (1:21). “All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee” is how the hymnwriter taught us this (*LSB* 781:1). Which means “it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey [God] (Meaning of 1st Article).

B. As citizens of America, we give to Caesar what is Caesar.

God is a God of order and not of chaos. Even though His creation is filled with sin, God wants order. So, He gives us the 4th Commandment to

teach us that all authority comes from Him and that He entrusts His authority to different offices on this earth to preserve order. Luther called those in authority over us the “masks” of God. God puts on a “mask” -- Mom & Dad in the home, the pastor in Church, the governor in North Dakota, the police officer on the street, the teacher in the classroom -- but behind the mask is the authority and power of God to maintain order.

Remember my brother-in-law, Tom? Being a citizen of two earthly nations proved a little troubling for him. In that same way, our dual citizenship, life under two lords, lived in two kingdoms, can be a blessing and can be troubling at times.

Let me try to illustrate this for you. The pastor, by virtue of his call to the ministry, has authority in the Church and the governor or the president has authority in the state.

For the sake of example, let's say Pastor says drive any speed you want, speed limits do not apply to members of Concordia Lutheran Church. As you are traveling down the highway and a highway patrolman stops you to ask why you are driving so fast and you tell him, “Pastor told me I can drive as fast as I want.” Well, want to guess what's going to happen? That's right, you are going to get a speeding ticket, because I have no authority in the civil realm.

On the other side of the coin, let's say the governor or the president says that the Church must deny the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion; in other words, they must teach Reformed theology, that Holy Communion is nothing more than bread and wine. What would we do? Well, this is exactly what happened in Germany that lead our forefathers to emigrant to America and form our Lutheran Church-

Missouri Synod. In a situation like this, we would obey God rather than men, because earthly princes have no authority in the Church.

Strengthened by God's grace in Word and Sacraments, we are good citizens, of heaven and earth. We fear, love, and trust in God above all things. And, we "honor, serve and obey, love and cherish" those God has placed in authority over us. As citizens of an earthly realm and heaven, we do all to the glory of God.