

Pentecost 21 10/22/23
St. Matthew 22:15-22 24A

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

“I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home,” the words of the well-loved hymn go. The words of the hymn express the truth Jesus is teaching us in our Gospel. Paul teaches us, *Our citizenship is in heaven (Ph 3:20)*. Yet, here, today, we are citizens of an earthly kingdom – North Dakota, United States of America, as well. And, as citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we are subject to God, and as citizens of North Dakota, the United States, we are subject to earthly rulers. We live under two lords, in two kingdoms, and we are citizens of both kingdoms, with duties, obligations, in each kingdom. And sometimes those obligations can butt heads.

Look at our Gospel this morning, *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him*, the Evangelist writes (v. 15). The Pharisees hated the Romans. They wanted them out of their land. But, their hatred for Jesus was even worse than their hatred for the Romans. So, they teamed up with their rivals, the Herodians -- those who supported the rule of the Romans -- to trap Jesus. After trying to put Him off guard with flattery, they sprang their question, *“Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not (v. 17)?”* If He said, “no,” the Herodians would report Him to the Roman government and He would be executed for treason. If He said, “Yes,” the Pharisees would denounce Him as disloyal to His nation of Israel.

Jesus, knowing they were trying to entrap Him, gives a Jesus answer. Using a Roman coin, He asked, *“Whose likeness and inscription is this?”* “Caesar’s,” they replied. *Then He said to them, “Therefore render to*

Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
(cf. Matthew 22:19-22).

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. They were to render to Caesar's, the ruling authority, what is due him. In this case, that meant paying taxes. And, then Jesus adds, that as citizens of heaven, give God what is God's.

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 we riot and burn buildings, and loot businesses.

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. By His perfect obedience and death, Jesus has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believer. Yet, today, we do not live in heaven, we live on earth. Even though His creation is filled with sin, God is a God of order and not disorder (cf. 1 Co 14:33). 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.

Remember my HALLOWEEN MASK. If I put the mask on, who am I? No, it's me, Pastor. So, it is that Martin Luther called those in authority over us the "masks" of God. Behind the mask is always God. Remember: God is a God of order, and not chaos (cf. 1 Co 14:33). So, He puts on the "mask" of mom and dad in the home, the mayor, governor, policeman in the civil realm, the teacher in the classroom, the pastor in the congregation, to preserve and keep order. And behind all that authority is God. So, by obeying those in authority over us, we are really and truly obeying God.

So it is that as citizens of an earthly kingdom and citizens of heaven, we give to Caesars the things that are Caesars, and we render "to God the things that are God's."

In the new birth of our baptism, we have been made new in Christ. Renewed in Christ, we reflect and show the image of Christ to this world. In our thoughts, words, and deeds, we reflect the glory of God as citizens of heaven and citizens of an earthly state. And, we always remember that there are privileges and responsibilities of our citizenship in each kingdom. And, renewed in Christ, we enjoy each privilege and seek to fulfill each responsibility.

As citizens of heaven, we fear, love and trust in God above all things.

We don't worry, stew, and fret, nor trust in lady luck. We gladly hear and learn His Word; and we don't believe the lies of the devil. We respect life – including the life of the unborn, the elderly, the infirm. We treat marriage as the most wondrous blessing from God that it is, and that means regarding it as the life-long between one man and one woman. We don't steal. We are content with life and stuff God has given us. We rejoice with our neighbor in their blessings from God, we are not envious and jealous of them.

As citizens of North Dakota and America, we give to Caesar what is Caesar's, that is, we give the respect and obedience to the authorities over us that we owe them. For example, we pay our taxes and we drive the speed limit. You obey your teacher in the classroom, and do the homework that the teacher assigns you. If coach tells you to run a lap, and you want to be part of the team, you run a lap. Mom or dad tell you to take out the garbage or clean your room, you do it.

REMEMBER: you don't have to like, you have to do it. **ILL: 55 mph speed limit.** Because, again, by obeying those in authority over us, the masks, we are obeying God.

Life under two lords, lived in two kingdoms, can be a blessing and can be challenging as well.

Let me give you a simple illustration. I, by virtue of my call to the ministry, have authority in the Church and Gov. Doug Burgum, by virtue of his election, has authority in the state.

For the sake of example, let's say I declare that you can drive any speed you want, speed limits no longer apply to members of {Zion} Concordia Lutheran Church {in other words, you can just keep driving as fast as you always have!). So, as you are speeding down the highway, you are stopped by a highway patrolman and he proceeds to give you a ticket.

So, you tell him, “Pastor Heller told me I can drive as fast as I want.”
Guess what, you are going to get a ticket.

Or, let’s say, I tell the kids that they do not have to do homework in school anymore. So, tomorrow in school, they tell their teachers that Pastor Heller said they don’t have to do homework anymore. Want to guess what will happen? That’s right, you are going to get in trouble for not doing your homework.

Why can I not do these things? I have no authority in the state or in the classroom. The only authority God has entrusted to me is spiritual authority, the forgiving and retaining of sins, in the Church.

On the other side of the coin, let’s say -- **and I emphasize this is for the sake of illustration** -- Gov. Burgum passes a law that says all churches must deny the real presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar {[history LCMS](#)} and perform same sex marriages. What would we do? We would follow in the footsteps of Peter in Acts, “We must obey God rather than men (Ac 5:29)!” That is because Gov. Burgum has no authority in the Church, his authority is in the civil realm.

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.