**MODIFIED SERVICE- 20TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST- October 18, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 20th Sunday of Pentecost, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

Yesterday morning there was a pretty hard frost in Tavistock, but it was good to see the sunshine. Northern Ontario has received some snow, it can stay there for another month…at least!

Council will meet again this week to discuss Zion’s reopening, look for another phone call and email mid week.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**GREETING (ELW p. 213)**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW p. 215)**

Let us pray.

Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**OPENING HYMN- God Whose Giving Knows No Ending- ELW 678**

1 God, whose giving knows no ending,  
from your rich and endless store:  
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,  
costly cross, grave's shattered door,  
gifted by you, we turn to you,  
off'ring up ourselves in praise;  
thankful song shall rise forever,  
gracious donor of our days.  
  
2 Skills and time are ours for pressing  
toward the goals of Christ, your Son:  
all at peace in health and freedom,  
races joined, the church made one.  
Now direct our daily labor,  
lest we strive for self alone;  
born with talents, make us servants  
fit to answer at your throne.  
  
3 Treasure, too, you have entrusted,  
gain through pow'rs your grace conferred;  
ours to use for home and kindred,  
and to spread the gospel word.  
Open wide our hands in sharing,  
as we heed Christ's ageless call,  
healing, teaching, and reclaiming,  
serving you by loving all.

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 45:1-7**

A reading from Isaiah.

1Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped  
 to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed:  
 2I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,  
 3I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places,  
 so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.  
 4For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name,  
  I surname you, though you do not know me.  
 5I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me,  
 6so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.  
 7I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things.

**PSALM: Psalm 96:1-9 [10-13]**

1Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
2Sing to the Lord, bless the name of the Lord; proclaim God’s salvation from day to day.  
3Declare God’s glory among the nations and God’s wonders among all peoples.  
4For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, more to be feared than all gods.   
5As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; but you, O Lord, have made the heavens.  
6Majesty and magnificence are in your presence; power and splendor are in your sanctuary.  
7Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord honor and power.  
8Ascribe to the Lord the honor due the holy name; bring offerings and enter the courts of the Lord.   
9Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; tremble before the Lord, all the earth.  
10Tell it out among the nations: “The Lord is king! The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples with equity.”  
11Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.  
12Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O Lord,  
 for you come to judge the earth.  
13You will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with your truth.

**SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

1Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,  
  To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:  
  Grace to you and peace.  
 2We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-22**

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. 16So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” 18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” 21They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” 22When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

**SERMON**

Benjamin Franklin wrote to a friend in 1789 a saying that is still popular today, “in this world nothing can be certain except death and taxes.”[[1]](#footnote-1)  Again the adage of the more things change the more things stay the same holds true. Here in 2020, we have our fair share of taxes to pay, be it property tax, income tax, or GST and HST to name but a few. The folks who lived in antiquity also had their fair share of taxes to pay consisting of a temple tax, land tax, and custom taxes. There was also another tax that had to be paid only by the Jewish citizens in the Roman Empire, and that is the tax that is spoken of in our gospel reading today. The tax was called the imperial tax. It was a yearly tax of one denarius that was paid to the Roman emperor by the Jewish people to support the Roman occupation of Israel. It was a humiliating tax to have to pay because the Jewish people were paying to allow the Romans to oppress them. The tax also created a burden for poor Palestinians who struggled to survive. Not only was the tax humiliating for Jewish citizens, but paying it also broke the first two commandments, because the coin was engraved with a picture of Tiberius Caesar, august son of Augustus and high priest. Tiberius claimed to be of godly descent and expected to be worshipped. This was worshiping idols at its finest. Yes, authority, taxes, and oppression were alive and well in antiquity.

        That is your cultural antiquity lesson for the day, let us get back to our reading this morning! Jesus is still in the temple when he is confronted by the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians. As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, Jesus had just arrived in Jerusalem, the city of power both religiously and politically. He entered and cleansed the temple and criticized the religious leaders. He continued to frustrate the, so much that they believed that he needed to be stopped. So, the Pharisees and the Herodians (who did not get along at all)came together and decided that they were going to try and entrap Jesus, then he would be arrested, and the problem would be solved.

         They begin to converse with Jesus in a condescending way and ask him, “is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” They finally think they have Jesus just where they want him because there is no correct answer to the question. If Jesus says yes, he sides with the Romans, he is considered a traitor by the religious authorities. If he says no he is a rebel and will be arrested by the Romans for treason. It is a no-win situation for Jesus.

         But we all know this man called Jesus and how he turns things upside down. His response is another question asking them to show whose head is on the coin that is to be paid. And here is the proverbial mic drop moment, because once the Pharisees pull the coin out of their pocket, they admit that they are paying the tax. Hence Jesus calling them hypocrites. The Pharisees, by carrying and producing the coin are showing loyalty to Tiberius and neglecting their true citizenship and their true belonging in the kingdom of God.

         When Jesus cleansed the temple, he was renouncing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Jesus was not abandoning Israel; he was reiterating his commitment to the covenant of God. This is the same action that Jesus took in the temple when he stated that one needed to give the emperor what is the emperors and to give to God what is God’s. Jesus was not claiming that one did not need to pay taxes, but one needs to pay only what is due and no more. But what about giving to God what is God’s? What exactly does that mean to us as Christians?

         Genesis 1:27 states that each of us is created in the image of God. Each of us are beloved children of God who in the gift and promise of our baptism is given new life each and every day. God is asking us to come to him, to come to him in faith and love knowing that there is nothing we can do to shed our identity as beloved children of God. God wants us to live abundantly with ourselves and with one another. God wants us to love our neighbour just as we have been loved. The identity and values that we share as Christians empower us to stand with those who cannot stand on their own and to be the voice of those whose voice has been silenced and broken. God comes to renew us and lead us through the complexity of our lives. God comes to us through the brokenness and anxiety, through the joy and sorrow, through the change and doubt, reminding us of God’s faith and love for us. Yes, we give to God what is God’s.

   I have to agree with Jesus about paying taxes, we must pay them as they are what keeps our countries running. So, even though we grumble and complain, we too can rend to the government what is the governments. But, we also have the joy and promise of giving to God what is God's, and that is ourselves, our perfectly imperfect selves. And in doing so, we give witness to God’s amazing works and presence in the world. We give witness to God’s amazing love, and we give witness to God’s amazing grace through the life, death, and resurrection of his only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The Pharisees and the Herodians left Jesus that day amazed by his words of equality, impartiality, and love of God. We too can be amazed by the wondrous power of God in our lives. Let it be so! Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY- God is Here ELW 526**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbkNXq71iis**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbkNXq71iis)

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

With confidence in God’s grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Gracious God, you call us by name and invite us to share your good news. Send your Holy Spirit among preachers, missionaries, and evangelists. We give thanks for the witness of your servant Luke, the evangelist, whom the church commemorates today. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of praise, the heavens and all creation declare your salvation. From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the whole universe show forth your goodness. Raise up devoted stewards of all that you have made. We remember the victims of flooding in Southern India, those affected by fires in Tanzania and the western United States, and all affected by continuing hurricanes along the Gulf Coast of the United States. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all, may your word of justice sound forth in every place and time. Restore divided nations and communities with your reconciling truth and bring justice to all who are oppressed and in poverty. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of light, we pray for those living with pain, illness, isolation, grief, anger, or doubt, especially Eddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Carol, Janet, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Join their voices in a new song, assuring them that you call them each by name. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, you show no partiality. May your spirit guide the work of justices, magistrates, court officials, and all vocations of the law, that your promise of restoration may be known. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Living God, as you raised Jesus from the dead, so raise up those who have died in you. We give thanks for their witness, confident of your rescuing welcome for all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

Mothering God, Father, +Son and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. Amen

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING SONG- God of Grace, God of Glory- ELW 705**

1 God of grace and God of glory,  
on your people pour your pow'r;  
crown your ancient church's story;  
bring its bud to glorious flow'r.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage  
for the facing of this hour,  
for the facing of this hour.  
  
2 Lo! the hosts of evil round us  
scorn the Christ, assail his ways!  
From the fears that long have bound us  
free our hearts to faith and praise.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage  
for the living of these days,  
for the living of these days,

3 Cure your children's warring madness;  
bend our pride to your control;  
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,  
rich in things and poor in soul.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
lest we miss your kingdom's goal,  
let we miss your kingdom's goal.  
  
4 Save us from weak resignation  
to the evils we deplore;  
let the gift of your salvation  
be our glory evermore.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
serving you whom we adore,  
serving you whom we adore.

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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1. Letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy (November 13, 1789), available at <https://archive.org/stream/writingsofbenjam10franuoft/writingsofbenjam10franuoft_djvu.txt> (accessed October 15, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)