

18th October 2020 6pm How involved should Christians be in Society?

Service led by Val Whiteman and Felicity Hawke, Sermon by Val Whiteman

Bible readings by Felicity Hawke and Geoff Whiteman. Prayers by Felicity Hawke

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Notices

[Val Whiteman:]

Good evening and welcome to our service at 6pm. It was lovely last week to see everybody actually in the church. Did you enjoy it, Felicity?

[Felicity Hawke:]

Yes, yes, it was really good to be able to see people again.

[Val:] Remind us what's happening next week and in the weeks to come.

[Felicity:] Next week will be a long teaching service and Phil Sowards is going to be teaching to us about 'Where is God in the pandemic?' And that will be online again, and the following week will also be online, and that will be Anne and Lynda and Roger Turner leading us in our Thanksgiving for Life service. So that'll be a special one, in that hopefully people would have received some letters, inviting them to come along and take part in that and view it.

[Val:] So when is the next one in church?

[Felicity:] The next one in church will be the second week in November, which I think is the eighth of November. Yes, and that will be an Evening Prayer again.

[Val:] Great. So one day we'll have a communion, maybe?

[Felicity:] Yes, yes, we'll give it a try, perhaps we'll try one in December if we're feeling brave 😊.

[Val:] You were saying to people to let you know what people thought about the services, weren't you?

[Felicity:] Yes, it'd be really useful to know from both the people who were in church last Sunday and the people who were viewing the service online, to just know how you felt about it, whether it was more meaningful being in church for you, whether you found it distracting, or awkward, and for those viewing it online, was it difficult having people actually there as well as being at home, or was it a nice feeling, that you were part of a community that was actually in the church? So, any thoughts that you've got, please let me know, either email me or if you haven't got my details, then send something to Denise and she'll pass that on, I'm sure.

[Val:] Yes, I think also the same if people want prayer or anything like that, to get in touch with us by either our emails or by Denise, and we'd love to talk to you and pray with you because we know it's just such a difficult time.

[Felicity:] Yes, yes.

Preparation

[Val:] Okay, so we're now going to start our order for Evening Prayer. If you've got the green book it's on page 10, right from the start. I think some people have downloaded this as well. So, let's spend a moment just thinking about what we're going to do, that we're going to worship our wonderful Heavenly Father, just for a moment.

[pause]

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you

All and also with you.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

All Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever.

We have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God's holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Now we think about the things that we may have done or said or thought that are displeasing to God.

So, a moment where we reflect on what we need to bring to our Heavenly Father for forgiveness.

[pause]

Confession

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**All Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

Absolution

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, sovereign God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You led your people to freedom
by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
May we who walk in the light of your presence
acclaim your Christ, rising victorious,
as he banishes all darkness from our hearts and minds.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Opening prayer

The day is almost over, and the evening has come;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your Spirit come down upon us
to set us free to sing your praise
for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Here is Love, Vast as the Ocean

1. Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Loving-kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heav'n's eternal days.

2. On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heav'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

} x 2

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1 [NIV 1984]

[Felicity:]

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,

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

Grace and peace to you.

2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell 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 rescues us from the coming wrath.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 99

[alternate sections read by Geoff and Val Whiteman:]

1 The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble;

he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.

2 Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.

3 Let them praise your great and awesome name – he is holy.

4 The King is mighty, he loves justice – you have established equity;
in Jacob you have done what is just and right.

5 Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name;
they called on the LORD and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.

8 LORD our God, you answered them;
you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds.

9 Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

World without end.

Amen.

Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 [NIVUSA]

[Geoff Whiteman:]

Payng the Imperial tax to Caesar

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?

19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

21 “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

[Val Whiteman:]

Thank you, Geoff.

The title of the talk today is ‘How Involved Should Christians Be In Society?’ And I think, you know, given the COVID situation, we'd all answer, “Well, we'd really like to be very involved in society at the moment and we're not and we can't be.” So if we're looking at this story that Geoff just read to us, I think it's a wonderful story and it's so clever. And I expect we all know about the setup. Jesus is being challenged by two different groups, the Herodians, who didn't mind paying the taxes to the Romans, and the Pharisees, who did. And they thought of this brilliant way to trap Jesus into showing His views, which would mean He would alienate at least one part of the Jewish nation whatever He said, because if He said ‘yes’ to taxes, He would offend most of the Jews, who hated Roman rule. And if He said ‘no’, He'd run the risk of getting arrested as a troublemaker. So it was a really clever trap, except that Jesus has no trouble, as we heard, in dealing with all their schemes, and He makes it clear that He knows exactly what they're up to. And His answer is really clever and really ambiguous.

What does He mean - “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's?” I expect like you I've heard quite a lot of explanations for this over my time in sermons and various things. The most extreme I remember was from Richard Wurmbbrand. I don't know whether... (probably you have to be quite old to remember him at all¹) but he was a Romanian pastor who was imprisoned by the communist state in the 70s, and we met him when he came over to meet a friend of ours while we were at university. He said, and he spoke from the knowledge of a very repressive regime that had imprisoned and tortured him, “What do dictators deserve from us? A kick up the backside! No more, no less. And that's what you can interpret Jesus is saying.” I'm not sure I go along with that entirely. But you have to remember that for Jesus, He was in an occupied country: the Romans were not kindly towards people who wanted freedom, and certainly not

1 Born 1909, died 2001

understanding of Jewish people who weren't going to acknowledge Caesar as lord. You note in the story that Jesus has to ask for a denarius. So he's not exactly made of money: He has to ask somebody else to give it to Him. He is so poor in worldly goods, in money, that He doesn't possess one, one assumes. God who makes absolutely everything doesn't have the economic clout to pay the taxes for Himself. Do you remember that really odd story in Matthew 17², where Peter asks Jesus whether they had to pay the temple tax or tax to the Romans, and Jesus told him to go and fish, and he'd find a coin fish with a coin in its mouth, which he should use to pay the taxes for Jesus and for himself. Jesus makes the point in that story that the children of God should be exempt. But because He doesn't want to cause offence, He would pay the tax.

In *this* case, Jesus has a coin given to Him. And on the coin is the head of Caesar (I have to say this is actually a very innocuous George III coin so it has got stuff written on it but it doesn't say what it did around Caesar's coins). It would be a coin denarius minted with the words around it, which would suggest that Tiberius, the Caesar at the time, was related by Augustus his father to the gods, because Augustus was deified when he died. Roman emperors after Augustus were quite routinely deified. Not all took it as seriously as possibly Augustus did. You remember that Vespasian allegedly said on his deathbed, "Deary me! I think I'm becoming a god!" It was handy to link religion with state power. After all, if your leader was a god you worshipped Him and you didn't question where the power came from. That would be wrong.



So political and religious power were entwined in Rome, which is why Christians got into such trouble in the early Church. They were absolutely model citizens, apart from their refusal to acknowledge the Emperor as God. Jesus here appears to be saying, "If you profit from the Roman state, that is, you use their roads, you are well-governed, you keep their laws and their laws keep you safe, if you benefit from all of that, then it's right you should pay the taxes. However, just as the coin is stamped with its image of Caesar, so all human beings are stamped with the image of God. So we pay back to God what belongs to Him, namely ourselves." And I think that clarifies it a bit.

In the Thessalonians passage. Paul holds the church there as a model of what witnesses to Jesus should be. They're known throughout the area as being wholeheartedly for God, even under persecution. They grow in faith and knowledge as they proclaim the Word of God to people around them, and they don't compromise with the world, but they work to ensure that everyone knows how they can be saved. You remember that there's this division between the world and the Church, the world and spirits, which grew over time. And extremely, people would completely divide them and have nothing whatsoever to do with the world, and try to live outside it, as it were, simply in the spiritual realm. I don't think Jesus or Paul is saying anything like that at all. Jesus says, If you benefit from the state, you give back to the state: that is right and proper, but what you don't do is give *yourself* to the state because that belongs to God.

So, what do we do? Well, very little at the moment, and we can't, can we? But we are very privileged to live in a prosperous country, even with the difficulties that COVID brings. We're privileged to be able to pay taxes too, and I know that might not sound too popular, but for me it's a really amazing thing that I earn enough to be able to pay taxes, so that those who are not as fortunate as I am can be helped. Because we have a duty, according to Jesus, to bring our talents and our money to ensure that we continue to be rightly governed. We don't live under a dictatorship, we don't live under occupation, we vote for our government, and many of the reasons that we have such a liberal democracy is because of the Christian faith we adhere to. We must pray that we continue to be rightly governed. We need to stand up for the right, and make sure, where

there's a conflict between us as Christians, and the government, then we *do* stand up for rights as we see it, not being swayed by current thinking. And I'm not saying exactly (because I haven't got time) what those rights might be, where you'd make a dividing line. I think we get caught up sometimes in the moral aspects of faith. Well, what Jesus is actually saying is that as God's children, we must be concerned to become like Him, because we are made, and we continue to become being made, in His image. That's the focus. Jesus gave up His life for us. And we do the same for our brothers and sisters, some of whom don't know God yet. Do you remember in 1 John 3:16 it says,

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

What we don't do is sit in judgement on them. So, principally we worry about ourselves and our relationship with God, and the amazing privilege we have of being stamped clear-through with the image of God. So we have a duty to be model citizens of our country, to encourage good governance, to play our parts, but not to the extent that we forget our allegiance to God, who made us, by His grace, makes us citizens of His Kingdom.
Amen.

Can we spend a moment just thinking about some of the things I've said, whether you agree with them or not, get it straight in your head what you think God is saying to you about how you should live.

[pause]

[Felicity:]

Thank you, Val, for those thought-provoking words. We'll take those into the coming week, I think. It's not always easy, is it, to decide where our loyalties should lie and how we should react to things that we don't agree with.

The Creed

Let's remind ourselves of what we believe, in the words of the Creed.

**All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Intercessions

[Felicity:]

And so we come to our prayers

In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

Father God, we pray for your church around the world. We pray for those countries where it's not easy to be a Christian, or even worse, it is illegal. And we ask for strength, courage and perseverance for Christians in those places. We pray for the family and friends of the teacher killed in Paris because of religious hatred. And we bring to you all our church leaders, here at St John's, in the diocese, and in the worldwide Church.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for our country and for all countries at this dreadful time of the pandemic. Guide our leaders into wise and just decisions, and to help us to follow the rules and guidelines, even when we don't agree with them. Give us a generous heart towards all those who have to make tough decisions. It's always easier to see what should be done when we're not responsible for doing it, or when we're looking back at past actions. We pray too for those living in places where social distancing is not an option, where staying at home means starvation, and where sickness means coping alone.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Lord, we bring our local community to you with gratitude. We're blessed with a lovely town, beautiful countryside and generally friendly and helpful people. Thank you for stirring the hearts of so many people to help others. Fill us all with love for our neighbours, as we go towards darker days, and the rise in illness. Be with the lonely, the frightened and the confused.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Today is the feast of St. Luke, the physician.

We pray, Father God, that you will be very close to all those who are suffering and sick from whatever cause, and bring them your healing. We remember Angie Purdom, as she and the family look for ways to improve her condition. And we thank you for the healing that's already happened. We pray for Fred and Ann Farrell, settling into the Manor. And we pray for Jane and Elizabeth, the daughters of Gill Rose, as they come to terms with the death, the loss of their mother. And in a moment's silence, we think of those we know who need our prayers at this time.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Collect for the day (19th Sunday after Trinity)

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you;
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

And gathering all our prayers and praises into one, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray.

**All Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.**

Evening Prayer collect

As we come to the end of our service this evening, thank you for joining us. In a moment we'll sing the final hymn, *At the Name of Jesus*. But first I thought it would be good to join in the traditional collect for evening prayer, if you remember it.

**Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray,
and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

Blessing

And the prayer from St. Teresa, which I hope you will receive as a blessing:

May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you're exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
Amen.

Hymn: At the Name of Jesus

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|--|---|
| <p>1. At the name of Jesus
Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess Him
King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
We should call Him Lord,
Who from the beginning
Was the mighty Word.</p> <p>2. Humbled for a season
To receive a name
From the lips of sinners
Unto whom He came,
Faithfully He bore it
Spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious,
When from death he passed.</p> | <p>3. Name Him, brothers, name Him,
With love strong as death,
But with awe and wonder
And with bated breath:
He is God the Saviour,
He is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshipped,
Trusted, and adored.</p> <p>4. In your hearts enthrone Him;
There let Him subdue
All that is not holy,
All that is not true.
Crown Him as your Captain
In temptation's hour:
Let His will enfold you
In its light and power.</p> |
|--|---|

5. Brothers, this Lord Jesus
Shall return again,
With His Father's glory,
With His angel train;
For all wreaths of empire
Meet upon His brow,
And our hearts confess Him
King of glory now.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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