

October 18 – Kingdom of the Left Sunday Sermon
A Sermon from Lutheran Family Service
Matthew 22:15-22 “Caesar’s Issues—God’s Truth”

[Pastors—Lutheran Family Service offers this sermon to be used in whole or in part or as just a source of ideas. Please consider some form of “Kingdom of the Left” focus on Sunday, October 18. The Christian’s prayers and voice are needed in the upcoming election.]

Matthew 22:15-22 (ESV)

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. 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. 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.

With a general election just sixteen days away, this text is very appropriate. Some would say it is appropriate because it shows a clear distinction between what is Caesar’s and what is God’s and thus supports the notion held by many—maybe some of you—that the church should not be involved in politics and I should not even be bringing this up from the pulpit. To quote Dr. Robert Benne who wrote in the August edition of the *Lutheran Witness* regarding this supposed separation, “Noting could be further from the truth.”

To be sure, our text does make a distinction between government and God, but it is not a distinction in which they are diametrically opposed to one another. It is a distinction in which they are in relationship with one another. When we understand that relationship, it makes this text very appropriate sixteen days before an election. Understanding that relationship does not tell us WHO to vote FOR. It tells us WHERE to vote FROM. As people redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we vote from a heart of faith in Him and in His truth.

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Luther dealt with this distinction by teaching about two kingdoms—the Kingdom of the Right and the Kingdom of the Left. The relationship between the two begins by understanding that even though there are two kingdoms, there is only one King. God is in charge of both. God works in and through both. In the Kingdom of the Right, God rules over His people with His grace as administered by His Church on earth. We do not enter this kingdom through some human royal bloodline or birthright. We are from a sinful blood line, our human parents. Thus, from the moment of our conception we are enemies of God, sinful, in need of a Savior.

But a Savior we have! Our God, our King, took upon Himself our human nature from the moment of His conception, a miraculous conception, a holy conception. His holy life He lived in our place. His holy suffering and death on the cross satisfied our King’s justice and paid sin’s awful wages once and for all, once and for you. His holy resurrection guarantees new life for us here and now and the certain hope of our own resurrection when He returns. He splashes this new life and certain hope upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism. He gives us His Holy Spirit and faith and makes us members of His Kingdom, royal sons and daughters through adoption. We enter His Kingdom by virtue of the royal bloodline of Jesus shed for us for the forgiveness of sins.

Now God rules in our lives and is at work in our lives through His grace. We live in it and are surrounded by it. Nothing can touch our lives without passing through the grace of our King. He brings this to us through His means of grace as administered by His Church. We have joyous responsibilities in His Kingdom, things to “render” to Him as our text says. He calls us to render our love to Him and to our neighbor. He calls us to render obedience to His commands

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to live as royal sons and daughters. He calls us to bring others into His Kingdom as we witness to His love in word and deed. He calls us to influence the culture in which we live by being its light and salt. That brings us to the other of God’s Kingdoms, the Kingdom of the Left.

In the Kingdom of the Left, God’s rules over us through authorities He places over us—parents, employers, teachers, and the government. The latter is our focus today. God reminds us in Romans 13 that the governing authorities come from Him. He works in and through them to accomplish His will. As we have responsibilities in the Right-Hand Kingdom, so we have responsibilities in the Left-Hand Kingdom. We are to “render to Caesar” as our text says. God asks us to honor our public leaders and pray for them. We are to obey the laws and regulations government places over us unless they require us to do something contrary to God’s revealed truth. We obey God rather than man. We are to participate in our government as we are able and, as we said, bring our Christian influence to bear when we do.

This is where the relationship aspect comes in. We do not leave our Christian citizenship papers behind in the Kingdom of the Right when we participate in political activities in the Kingdom of the Left. Remember, we have dual citizenship! We live in both at the same time. Our Christian citizenship dictates how we relate to others in the political arena. Things like, “Love your neighbor” (Matthew 22:39) and “Speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5) and “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8) still apply in the Kingdom of the Left. After all, our ultimate goal goes beyond trying to change the culture. We desire that God would change hearts and minds to know Him.

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But this verse also applies, “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). God calls us not just to joyfully and boldly *stand up* and proclaim God’s truth, but also to *stand against* those things the devil uses to oppose it. We can do both by being a voice in the public square and influencing people and laws and policies that protect God’s truth.

Even though the Pharisees and Herodians in our text were trying to “entangle” Jesus in His words, they do say good things about Him. “[W]e know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion” (16). It is from the perspective of God’s truth and His opinion that we engage issues in the public square. The August *Lutheran Witness* devoted most of its space to the responsibility of Christians being a voice in the public square. One author wrote, “Your identity in Christ trumps your identity as an American and even as an individual with opinions. Every time. No exceptions” (Peter Slayton *The Lutheran Witness* August 2020. P. 14). God’s truth and His opinion override all else.

That is why it is important not to lump all the issues out there under the category of “political issues.” Some of the things we deal with in the public square are God’s truth issues that have been politized. True, some issues are purely political. Christians can have varying opinions on these. We can disagree on things like taxes and health care and immigration. Pastors in pulpits have no business sharing their opinions on such issues. But when it comes to God’s truth issues—the sanctity of life and marriage and human sexuality—only God’s opinion counts. Pastors in pulpits are compelled to speak God’s truth on these issues especially as they are being trampled on and maligned in our culture. Pastors are compelled to remind us,

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not who to vote for, but where to vote from—our Christian responsibility to proclaim and defend God’s truth.

Some examples: We can disagree on the best way to care for the poor. But should someone suggest we deal with poverty by killing poor people, we would be compelled to boldly disagree based on God’s truth about the sanctity of life. We can disagree on the best way to deal with a crisis pregnancy situation and debate the pros and cons of parenting vs. adoption. But should someone suggest—as our society as a whole has done for nearly fifty years—that we deal with a crisis pregnancy by killing the unborn baby, we would be compelled to boldly disagree and proclaim God’s wonderful truth about the sanctity of life from the moment of fertilization. We can disagree on the best way to deal with suffering associated with chronic or terminal diseases or the effects of aging. We can discuss the options of home care, nursing home care, hospice care, etc. But should someone suggest we deal with human suffering by killing the sufferer—which is now legal in nine states and the District of Columbia through Physician Assisted Suicide—we would be compelled to boldly proclaim God’s comforting truth about His ability to work in and through suffering to accomplish His will and purpose.

How do we as baptized citizens of the Kingdom of the Right go about engaging our fellow citizens and government in the Kingdom of the Left? Some ideas:

- Have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). We engage from a humble perspective, acknowledging our imperfections and speaking the truth with gentleness and love. Remember, the bottom line is not changing our culture. It is changing hearts.
- Honor those God has placed in authority over us, especially those with whom we disagree.
- Pray for our leaders at every level of government.
- Pray for our country and that God, as Lord of the nations, will be at work according to His will.

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- Educate yourself and discern the difference between political issues and God’s truth issues.
- Lead others to such discernment.
- Pray for the election of candidates who will uphold God’s truth.
- Vote for candidates who will uphold God’s truth.

“Render unto Caesar”—Honor, obey, pray for, and respect the government God placed over us. “Render unto God” – Love Him and your neighbor. Avail yourself to His Word and Sacraments. Obey His commands to live as royal sons and daughters. Bear witness to His love in word and deed. Engage the culture in which we live by being its light and salt to change it for good and, more importantly, so others might know the love of Jesus, His gift of forgiveness and eternal life. To the Lord of the Church and Lord of the nations be all glory. Amen.