

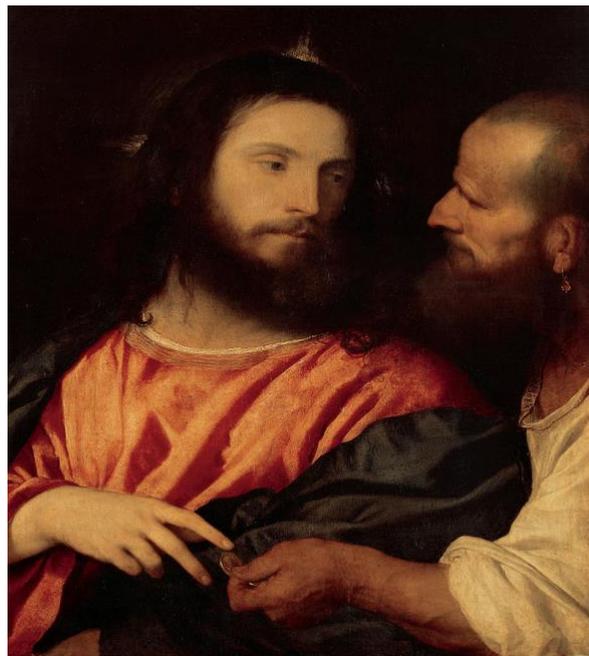
Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 18th October 2020



Dear Friends,

***'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and give to God what belongs to God.'***
(Matthew 22: 21)

Have you ever wished you'd had more time to think up a brilliant retort to a scarily loaded remark? When it comes to light-hearted banter, most of us can muster a witty riposte – our pre-service choir gatherings are often witness to that! Yet when someone shoots us with a poisoned arrow, with a comment meant to wound, it is often a different story altogether. Asked to give a response to the unseemly behaviour of a politician, Oscar Wilde was once quoted as saying *'It is always a silly thing to give advice, but to give good advice is fatal.'* Though he was using humour to avoid getting himself into hot water with an inappropriate answer, for all the world it would seem as if Wilde had been thinking of Jesus' predicament as he spoke.



'The Tribute Money' by Titian

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel this week, Jesus appears to be caught between a rock and a hard place. For Jesus to offer inappropriate advice would indeed seem silly. To offer good advice, however, might well be fatal. And it seems there were a lot of people that day, pushing Jesus to give some really good advice! Let's set the scene:

Once again, Matthew records how there were two key groups of people goading Jesus. On the one hand, there were the Pharisees who were opposed to Roman occupation and to the paying of taxes, both as a stand against Jewish subjection and because the money was being spent by their oppressors on maintaining pagan temples and lavish lifestyles. The second group were supporters of Herod Antipas; a Jewish political group that approved of the stability which resulted in Herod's compromise with Rome. Normally speaking, these two groups, the Pharisees and the Herodians, were bitter enemies, yet here they found common ground in the vested interests they each held against Jesus.

The Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat because He exposed their hypocrisy. Herod's supporters feared Jesus would cause unrest; and that Rome would respond with harsh punishment. They had a common fear and a cunning plan: to corner Jesus by asking Him about the payment of taxes. If Jesus agreed it was right to pay the taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees could immediately accuse Jesus of going against God. Yet, if Jesus decided the taxes should not be paid, then Herod's men would invoke Roman statutes against him. Either way, Jesus' advice was certain to be fatal.

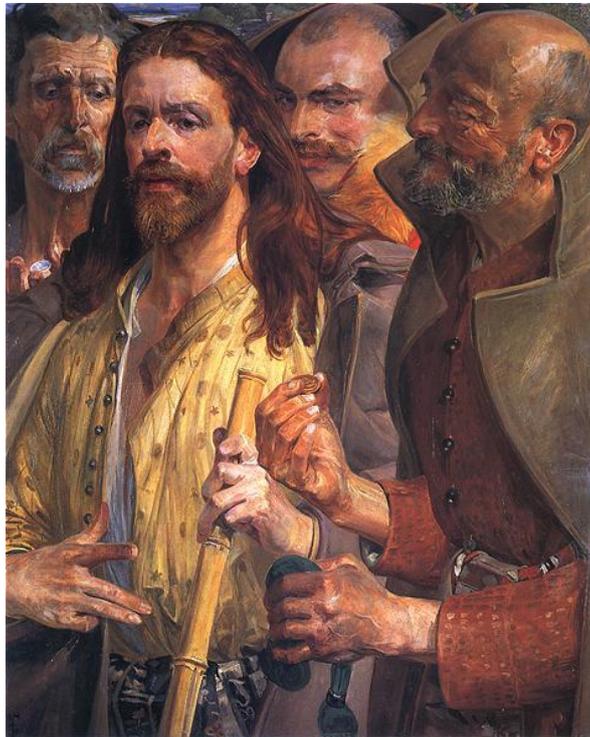
Jesus' answer was a masterstroke of political brinkmanship. The crowds were stunned; speechless. Matthew's Gospel reads 'they were amazed.' I bet they were! In a stroke, Jesus had honoured both Caesar and the Temple and had managed to expose the hypocrisy of the Religious leaders into the bargain!



'Caesar's Coin' by Peter Paul Rubens

However, despite all the politics of the moment, Jesus' response goes much deeper than a clever turn of phrase to help Him avoid arrest. 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's' speaks to the souls of all Christians, then and now. As He confronted His critics, Jesus was not concerned for his own life – he knew only too well how the momentum was building to a crescendo that would mark the end time for Him. As He responded to the Pharisees and to Herod's allies, Jesus wasn't worrying for himself at all. No! What concerned Jesus was us; All of us! Jesus was not pre-occupied by wit or barb, rather by His saving love.

Jesus' radical love spoke to the hearts of those around him in the crowd, challenging them to be transformed by the love of God. He stopped people in their tracks; they were rendered speechless by a stunning yet simple phrase which not only turned their own trap on its head but also called them all to examine their consciences and question whether they were living in true and obedient faith before God. *'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God.'*



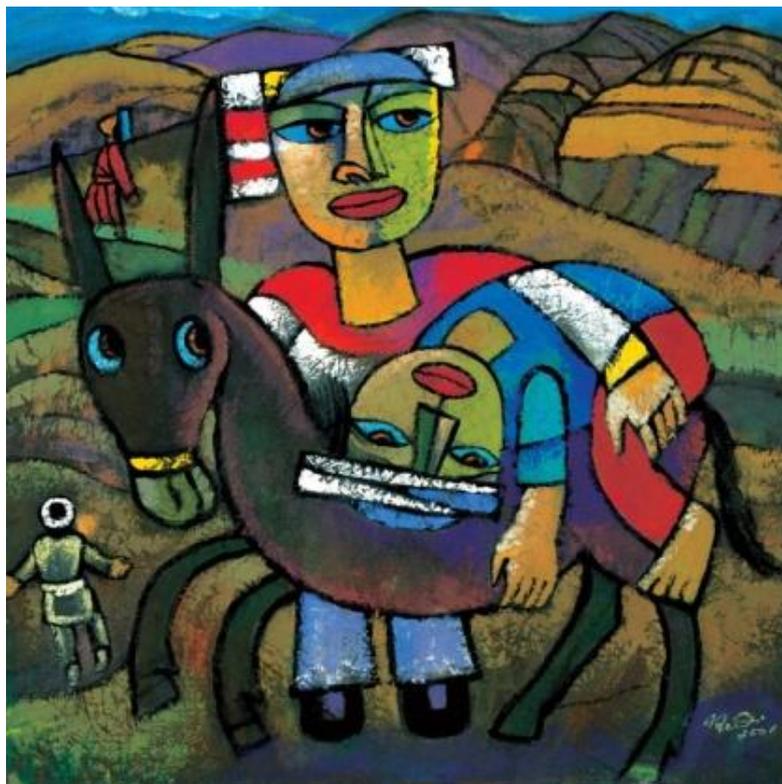
'Render Unto Caesar' by Malczewski Jacek

Jesus' differentiation between God and State defines beyond doubt how God calls each of us to obedience. On the one hand, we are called to live by the rules of our earthly citizenship; paying monies for the goods and services and benefits we receive here on earth; adhering to the rule of law as a current example! Yet Jesus also underlines our over-arching responsibilities before God – our citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whilst we are clearly obliged to keep the laws of the society in which we live, Jesus always focus on God first; through faithful obedience to Him will come the blessing of grace, freely given to those who believe and trust and hope and love. In moments of conflict such as we see in this story, our imperative is to honour God. We are called to live in His image, living our lives in all goodness; in turn honouring each other through consideration and generosity. Especially in our current times of turmoil.

And through this last point, what Jesus is clarifying (to the embarrassment of the Pharisees) is that when we do prioritise living our lives as God calls us to, we will already be conforming to the demands of Government.

Paul's message of faithfulness to God in his letter to the people of Thessalonica is a timely mirror to us of Jesus' call to show out genuine love to others and maintain our moral character even when we are being threatened or undermined by the behaviour of those around us in situations such as the Coronavirus epidemic. In today's society, we face the same sorts of problems as the Thessalonian community encountered, where people had lost sight of living as good citizens in a sinful world.

Listening to a debate over the standards of nursing care for the elderly in the context of Lockdown restrictions on the Today programme, I was stopped in my tracks by a commentator who said *'People have forgotten how to be kind to one another. We used to learn all about love and kindness in church.'* What a timely reminder to us as God's church on Earth to redouble our commitment to share the Gospel truths with the world however we can – both in Word and by our actions. As we are faithful to God, so we shine out His love to all.



'The Good Samaritan' by He Qi

The brilliant news from Thessalonica is not that they are a perfect people. What shines out is their commitment to try! Not many of us have the acerbic wit of Oscar Wilde; Jesus isn't asking us for that. What He longs for is that we honour God by giving the ordinary gifts and skills that we do have. He calls us to model love and joy; peace, patience, kindness; goodness and faithfulness; gentleness and self-control. What

Jesus tells us today is that our ordinary, faithful lives have the power to transform the lives of those who have forgotten how to care, how to be patient, how to love.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine the scene: In the midst of that seething throng of Pharisees and Roman sympathisers, there love was. Jesus Christ, son of God, at one with the Father and the Holy Spirit; ready to lay down His pure and precious life for one thing. Us!

And how do we thank Him for His sacrifice? How do we honour, as Paul puts it: 'the One who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgement?' By serving God faithfully!

Jesus challenges us to live our lives in all faith, for and with and through and in love for each other. Through the Holy Spirit He stands amongst us; He guides us through those tricky moments when we don't know what to do, when we can't find the right words; when to give good advice might prove fatal: He sets us free! Just as Jesus was ready and willing to transform the lives of the Pharisees and the rest of the crowd, there love is, in the centre of our lives, transforming us - calling us to shine out our love for others by the way we live our lives. God longs for us in very ordinary ways to touch the lives of others by our faithfulness.



'Awake My Soul' by Mike Moyers

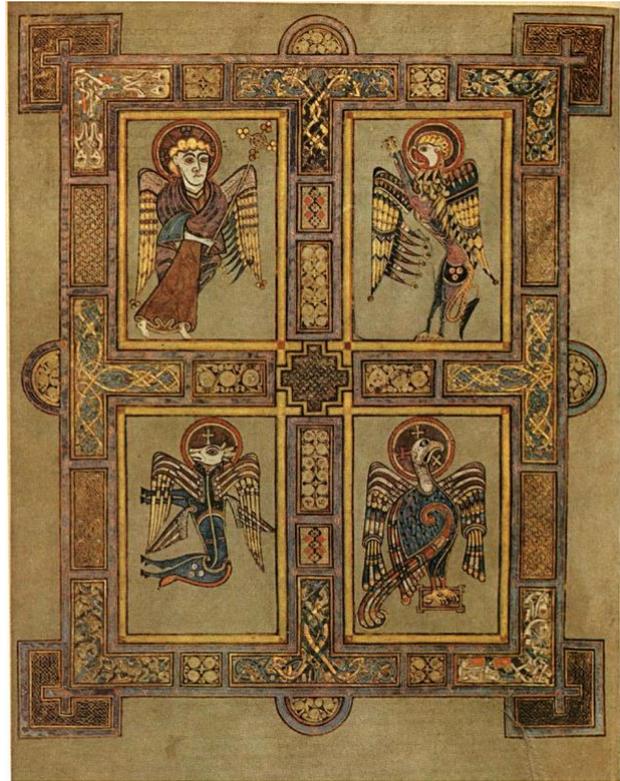
Just as the transformed people of Thessalonica found when they trusted themselves to the living and true God, 'Render unto Caesar' challenges all Christians to live out our lives by 'Faith expressing itself in love.' (Gal 5:6) Amen to that!

Yours, in the grace of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

St Luke the Evangelist



'Symbols of the Evangelists' from The Book of Kells

In a week when the Christian church commemorates many wonderful defenders of the faith, including Edith Cavell on Monday, 12th and Theresa of Avila on Thursday, 15th October, we remember and give thanks for the life of St Luke the Evangelist on Sunday, 18th.

From the 5th Century, the monastic Celtic monasteries spread the message of Christianity through extensive use of exquisite art, such as found in The Book of Kells which was created by Irish monks on Iona circa 800AD. The image above, depicts images of the symbols of the four Gospel-writers and Evangelists: Matthew's angel, Mark's lion, Luke's ox and John's eagle.

Saint Luke is often referred to as everyone's favourite GP! An urbane polymath, gifted in art, medicine, history and a proponent of women, Luke, was born in Antioch and became a good friend and follower of St Paul. For all that, however, we do not have much information on Luke himself. He is mentioned three times in the New Testament letters. Paul himself describes Luke as 'the beloved physician' and is recorded in his second letter to Timothy as being Paul's only companion in prison. Luke is credited with being both the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts of The Apostles in which Luke makes clear that the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ is available to all, regardless of gender, sexuality, social standing or nationality. Luke gives us the Christmas story, while John explains its meaning. Yet Luke's empathic narrative, like a good GP explaining a difficult diagnosis to a bewildered patient, reflects the culture of his own background and provides us with a much needed injection of of the human context of the event in which a fallen world is restored. As Christian writer, Martin

Warner, writes: 'Luke gives us the key players, Mary and Joseph, and the members of the wider family, Elizabeth and Zachariah, the parents of John the baptiser. These details, together with the access of ordinary people, such as shepherds, locate the theological mystery in a life that is essentially like ours.'



'St Luke drawing the Virgin' by Rogier van der Weyden

Luke challenges and inspires us to live in and through the being of Christ, bringing stories of Jesus' restoration of human dignity and healing to those who suffer violence and injustice and are in need of a good Samaritan; and where the hope of heaven feels ever more real in the exigencies of our current earthly predicament.

Collect Prayer for St Luke the Evangelist

Almighty God,
you called Luke the physician,
whose praise is in the gospel,
to be an evangelist and physician of the soul:
by the grace of the Spirit
and through the wholesome medicine of the gospel,
give your Church the same love and power to heal;
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.

Schedule of Services for October 2020

Our churches are open for regular prayer and for Sunday services - please see our website for more details at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

All seats at our services need to be booked in advance. Please see the table below and book your seats by either calling or emailing the **Benefice Office** on **(01962) 880845** or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
25 th Oct	10am - Holy Communion	10am - 4th Sunday Worship			



Collect Prayer for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

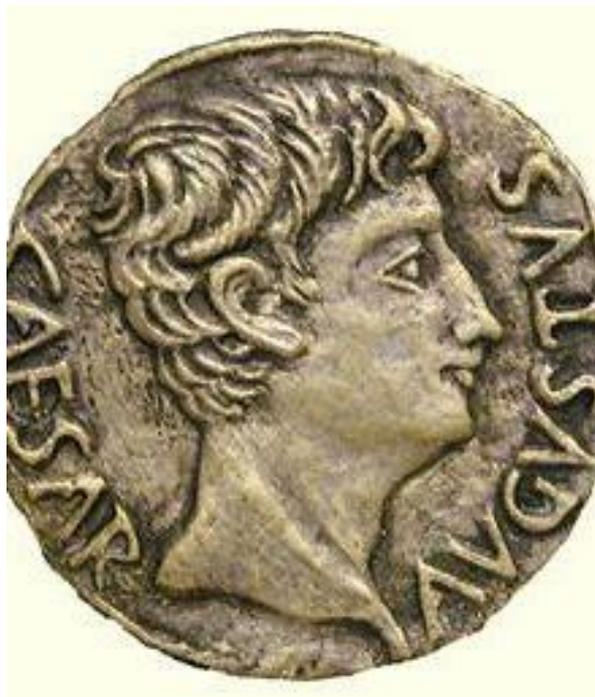
O God, forasmuch as without you
we are not able to please you;
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit
may in all things direct and rule our hearts;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 - The Faith of the Thessalonian Believers

This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace. We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.

And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.



Matthew 22: 15-22 - Taxes for Caesar

Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. They sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don't play favourites. Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'

But Jesus knew their evil motives. 'You hypocrites!' he said. 'Why are you trying to trap me? Here, show me the coin used for the tax.' When they handed him a Roman coin, he asked, 'Whose picture and title are stamped on it?' 'Caesar's' they replied.

Well, then,' he said, 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.' His reply amazed them, and they went away.