

## Sermon Bures Trinity 19 Oct 17

Isaiah 45:1-7

**45** 'This is what the LORD says to his anointed,

to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of  
to subdue nations before him

and to strip kings of their armour,  
to open doors before him

so that gates will not be shut:

<sup>2</sup>I will go before you

and will level the mountains;<sup>[a]</sup>

I will break down gates of bronze

and cut through bars of iron.

<sup>3</sup>I will give you hidden treasures,

riches stored in secret places,

so that you may know that I am the LORD,

the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of Jacob my servant,

of Israel my chosen,

I summon you by name

and bestow on you a title of honour,

though you do not acknowledge me.

<sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other;

apart from me there is no God.

I will strengthen you,

though you have not acknowledged me,

<sup>6</sup>so that from the rising of the sun

to the place of its setting

people may know there is none besides me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other.

<sup>7</sup>I form the light and create darkness,

I bring prosperity and create disaster;

I, the LORD, do all these things.

Matthew 22:15-22

Paying the poll-tax to Caesar

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>Tell us then, what is your opinion?  
Is it right to pay the poll-tax<sup>[a]</sup> to Caesar or not?’

<sup>18</sup>But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said,  
‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?’

<sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius,

<sup>20</sup>and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’

<sup>21</sup>‘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.’

<sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

## SERMON

The new British Ambassador in Austria was rather nervous;  
he was going to his first official dinner in Vienna.

There were lots of celebrities and diplomats and he felt a bit overwhelmed;  
but there was a good orchestra, and food and wine were wonderful  
so he got stuck in and decided to enjoy himself.

After several glasses of wine he decided to ask one of the ladies to dance.

He turned to the person sitting next to him who was wearing a

beautiful long dress encrusted with jewels

and asked if he could have the honour of the next dance.

He didn’t just get a refusal.... but also three very good reasons why.

“Number 1. This is not a ball... it’s a banquet.

Number 2. This is not dance music ... it’s The Austrian National Anthem

and Number 3. I am not a woman ... I am The Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna”

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A seemingly simple question but met with a crushing answer.....

The Gospel story has a seemingly simple question

“[Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?](#)”

... also met with a crushing answer!

By this stage, Jesus has been preaching,  
teaching and healing for nearly 3 years.

His crowd of followers had begun to talk about  
making Him the new king of Israel.

They thought... if Jesus were their King,

not even the Romans could hold them back.

so Israel would once again become a great nation.

But as you know, they already had a king, Herod (the one who'd executed John the Baptist). His followers were called Herodians and they wanted Herod as their king ... not Jesus.

So, these Herodians conspired with the Pharisees to discredit Jesus in front of the crowd.

What's odd is that the Pharisees and Herodians didn't usually get on. The Pharisees hated Rome and claimed it was heresy to pay Roman taxes. And the Herodians wanted a better relationship with Rome and so approved of the tax system.

The only reason they joined forces was because they were united in their fear and hatred of Jesus and desperately wanted to get rid of him.

If Jesus answered that the people **should** pay their taxes the Pharisees could condemn Him to the crowd as a friend of the Romans. BUT if Jesus replied that people should **not** pay their tax the Herodians would brand Him an enemy of Rome and have Him arrested.

It was a perfect trap.

And just to put a little extra honey on their trap, they put flattery into their question... hoping Jesus was vain. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. ...Tell us then, what is your opinion?..." And they smiled to themselves. because great teachers in the past had been tripped-up And they thought Jesus would be putty in their hands.

Well, He might have been putty... if He'd been an ordinary Rabbi. But... He wasn't --. He was God. Repeatedly – in the Gospels – we're told that "Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts"

In this encounter Jesus isn't "meek-and-mild" but incredibly sharp and direct, he wasn't frightened of attacking these men and exposing hypocrisy and sin when he saw it.

He knew exactly what to say. "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?" He's saying: "Seriously?... You think you can get me with such a silly question?"

...is that best you've got?"

Then Jesus turns everything around and lays a trap for them. He asks for a coin from their pocket ...and then says to them: "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

It was a simple question...  
but they were defeated straight away and they knew it, they could only reply "Caesar's".  
Well then... says Jesus: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

In that simple sentence, Jesus destroyed their trap. The Herodians couldn't accuse Him of being a revolutionary because He'd just endorsed paying the Roman taxes.

And the Pharisees used these very coins themselves - even for paying the Temple tax so in using them, the Pharisees were agreeing that Rome \_\_\_ owned the coins and so had the right to levy a tax.

Jesus probably needed to say no more because everyone could see that he had outwitted them and He just allowed his friends and followers to draw their own conclusions...

But Jesus answer also poses two question for us: **what** are **we** supposed to pay in taxes... and to God?

The money you carry in your wallet doesn't really belong to you. It belongs to the Bank of England, part of Her Majesty's Government. It's only a symbol of what you own.

The image on our money is a picture of the Queen to remind you that it's her's.

And Jesus was saying... the image on the coin declares who it belongs to. So we give money in taxes to Her Majesty' Government ...simple! Our attitude to money is really important isn't it? Even that really belongs to God...

In our home-group the other day... was this analogy: When you play Monopoly you gradually acquire property... and then houses and then hotels and then you get more and more rent, and I suppose it's harmless fun really but it says quite a lot about us doesn't it?

the greed and the atavistic joy or shouting “rent!” and so on.

BUT at the end of the game... what happens?

It all goes back in the box!

We must remember... at the end of our lives: “It all goes back in the box!”

We can't take any of it with us ... there are no pockets in shrouds...

so being generous with what we appear to own is a no-brainer.

And I know Bures are enormously generous

Today we have the chance to give to the Rohingya refugees escaping from persecution in Myanmar.

So, the next question for us today... is what do we give to God?

Where do I find God's image?

In Genesis Chapter 1, it says,

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...’”

So in a sense when you look in the mirror, you see the image of God so you and I... need to give what belongs to Him - back to Him.

I need to give ME back to God.

You need to give YOU back to God.

But how do we do that?

How do we give ourselves to God?

First, we believe in Jesus.

in Ephesians it says “Having believed in Jesus, you were marked in him with a seal, the Holy Spirit”

God puts His IMAGE inside us ...The Holy Spirit, to say we belong to Him.

And how do we know?

partly by knowing that everything we have is really his,

the world around us, our life, our families,

our friends, our homes, our wages even.

and we express that belief by coming to church,

by prayer, by reading the Bible

and hopefully by being thankful to him ...all the time... for everything.

In the OT reading Isaiah writes God's words:

you know that I am the LORD,

the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

..... I summon **you** by name

and bestow on **you** a title of honour ...

<sup>5</sup> I am the LORD, and there is no other...

Let's be in no doubt that Jesus was un-equivocal  
"Give back to God what belongs to God"

And Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship!

Religion is about Rules and Regulations and Legalism  
(that was all important to the Pharisees!)

A relationship is about **love**: God's love for us... and our love for Him.

So how does that work for you?

Do you speak to him in prayer? ...do you listen ...in prayer?

do you involve him in your decisions? ... is he your friend?

Do you want to be more like him?

Because "Jesus knows what you are thinking in your hearts"

We have a great and glorious God who says to us,  
"I am yours and you are mine.... I hold you in high esteem...  
... and I offer you eternal life"

Because God does most of the work for us,  
he loves us anyway,  
he saves us anyway ...  
once we have made our own declaration of faith.

In the next hymn we are going to sing later... notice the words  
My name is graven on His hands  
My name is written on His heart....

I was talking to a man the other day who told me  
he was trying hard to be a better Christian  
He said "it feels like I still have a way to go,  
it feels as though I'm heading for a beacon,  
like a lit-up buoy out in the water,  
I'm still swimming towards it. I really want to get there."

I said to him, perhaps you are there already?  
Because you are already under God's grace  
And think of this: perhaps God loves you just as you are now!

When we recite the creed in a few minutes,  
it shouldn't be just a recitation, said automatically,  
but an expression of our heartfelt belief, a conviction  
that has taken hold of our whole lives.

And when we receive communion, he offers us himself  
(in the bread and the wine) ...all over again;

and we offer ourselves to him... all over again,  
...make that mean something today!

That most important question is our attitude to Jesus,  
Who is He? And what is He to **us**?

Our answer to those questions will determine  
what we believe, how we live,  
and where we go when we die.

It's difficult to quantify how much we feel we belong to him....

When you make Jesus the Lord of your life.  
Everything you own belongs to Him.  
Even what's in your wallet and in your bank account  
but we still pay our taxes to the government.

The British Ambassador to Vienna got absolutely everything wrong,  
the occasion, the kind of music -  
and even the gender of the person he asked to dance,

...we only need to get two things right, paying our taxes to our Queen  
and giving ourselves to God.... Our King!