



TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18TH, 2020

TRAPPED: AUTHORITY - PUBLIC THEOLOGIES IN CONFLICT



Today we complete our thinking about authority. We have concluded over the past weeks that authority to be authority in the deepest Christian sense must be understood as an expression of God's grace, generosity, kindness. In short, that authority is about liberality. This has been the fundamental message behind the stories of Unforgiving Servant, the Generous Employer, the Two Sons, and the Wicked Tenants. The story last week, of the Wedding Banquet underscored the point in reverse, contrasting the "human king" and his predisposition to brutal injustice with the "God king", who is cast out.

Today we move from stories to a public confrontation concerning authority: the "face off" between Jesus and his opponents. In effect the account which focuses upon the immediate question of tax, is much broader, posing the question, to whom or what do we ultimately owe allegiance. The answer which Jesus gives "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's", is often interpreted along the lines of modern political theory about the separation of religion and the state, or if you like Martin Luther's "two kingdom theology" from the Reformation. As we read the biblical text from precisely this position of modernity, it seems logical to us that this is Jesus' meaning: that Jesus was an 'early day' modernist. I think, this pushes the limits too far. What then may we conclude about the issue of authority and ultimate allegiance when it comes to the state and indeed free market commercial institutions?

GATHERING

Announcements

We Prepare Ourselves: “In resurrectione tua” (Taizé, virtual choir) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-hybuhxJg8>

Welcome

Invitation to Worship

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Lighting the Paschal Candle

Hymn: Crown him with many crowns (TiS 228, Diademata, Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring)

Opening Prayers: “The Moses Moment”

In Christian faith we celebrate a God who has come to us in Jesus Christ and who teaches us how-to live-in community with others. This ethical sense stands at the heart of Christian understanding. There is however another dimension to faith: the desire to experience *God directly* without mediations as such. This is the sense of this story about Moses. At a low period in the journey of the Exodus, challenged by his people, who we saw last week, preferred the Golden Calf to Moses – which represented a return to the oppression of Egypt, rather than an \ escape from it – Moses yearns for immediacy, craves intimacy with Yahweh. At times, we all feel this way, frustrated with the veil that separates God from his creation and creatures. This prayer with which we begin this service, reflects this desire.

Blood-red sun
rises into
autumn ripened sky
splitting grey
morning open like
softened stone

***and something
gentle is
spilling through,***

embracing me
in the curl
of a vast upturned palm,

***the light touch
of a wide
welcoming hand.***

And did Moses wish
he could stay

in just this kind
of moment?

The Peace

In Arabic the greeting would be "*As-Salaam-Alaikum: "peace be unto you"*"

SMG

Introduction to the Theme: Entrapment: Public Theologies in Conflict

HEARING THE WORD

Some Preliminary Thoughts on What or Who is Ultimate

For it is, and must remain, the case that we must obey God rather than man.

Martin Niemoller

Every human being has, like Socrates, an attendant spirit; and wise are they who obey its signals. If it does not always tell us what to do, it always cautions us what *not to do*.

Lydia M. Child

What belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God? For Jesus and many of his Jewish contemporaries, everything belongs to God.

Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan

Exodus 33:12-23 (Good News Translation)

Caroline Turner

This reading takes many twists and turns. In it, we continue the Exodus journey. Last week we experienced the distinct reluctance of the people to continue the journey toward the freedom promised and facilitated by Yahweh, as they constructed a Golden Calf. Today we see Moses. own reluctance, as he enters a crisis of confidence, in both Yahweh and himself. In frustration, Moses demands to “know the Lord”, just as God ‘knows him”. The point is that Moses is dissatisfied with merely knowing the Lord’s *ways* and wants to know his *glory*, he wants to know God directly, face-to-face. Yahweh goes half way by agreeing to show Moses his “goodness”, suggesting that it is more important to know what kind of God Yahweh is, than to “see” God. In the end, the Lord agrees to Moses’ request to see him, but hides Moses in a cleft of the mountain and protectively covers him with his hand. Moses accordingly, gets to see the back of God passing by. Behind all of this, is the idea of the danger of seeing God, the utter “otherness” of God. To see God as Moses wishes, would be to be coerced. Yahweh desires our freedom, not our coercion.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “It is true that you have told me to lead these people to that land, but you did not tell me whom you would send with me. You have said that you know me well and are pleased with me. ¹³ Now if you are, tell me your plans, so that I may serve you and continue to please you. Remember also that you have chosen this nation to be your own.”

¹⁴ The LORD said, “I will go with you, and I will give you victory.”

¹⁵ Moses replied, “If you do not go with us, don't make us leave this place. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with your people and with me if you do not go with us? Your presence with us will distinguish us from any other people on earth.”

¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses, “I will do just as you have asked, because I know you very well and I am pleased with you.”

¹⁸ Then Moses requested, “Please, let me see the dazzling light of your presence.”

¹⁹ The LORD answered, “I will make all my splendour pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my sacred name. I am the LORD, and I show compassion and pity on those I choose. ²⁰ I will not let you see my face, because no one can see me and stay

alive, ²¹ but here is a place beside me where you can stand on a rock. ²² When the dazzling light of my presence passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back but not my face.”

Psalm 99

Caroline Turner

The structure of this psalm suggests ways it might have been used as part of a liturgy in ancient Israel. It keeps alternating between statements about the Lord and the people, statements made to the Lord, and others which could be uttered by the people. The psalm is a three-way dialogue between a worship leader, the people and the Lord. However, it is not always clear who is speaking to whom.

To begin, Verses 1 and 2 contain statements about the kingship of the Lord. As with Psalms 93, 97 and others, this psalm begins with the exclamation ‘The Lord is king!’ The kingship of the Lord is then expressed in relation to the peoples of the earth. They are called to tremble even as the earth quakes at the enthronement of the Lord. The Lord is described as universal sovereign but in a special way God is sovereign to the people Israel (v. 3). There is a specificity in this psalm as in other enthronement psalms which we cannot escape. The Lord is always proclaimed king in relation to someone and that someone is usually Israel. The kingship of the Lord is seen to be expressed in specific human instances of justice, equity and righteousness (cf. Isa 5:16).

The LORD reigns:

let all peoples, and all the earth tremble in holy awe.

The LORD is great, exalted over all the nations.

Let all peoples praise the great name of the LORD,
the one name to be held in holy awe.

The LORD, our God is holy.

Indeed, mighty king, loving justice, you have established order;

in Jacob you brought about your justice and actions which put things right.

Exalt the LORD, and bow down at the footstool of our God.

Holy is the LORD.

Moses and Aaron were among God’s priests,

and Samuel was among those who called on the name of the LORD.

They cried to the LORD and the LORD God answered them.

The LORD God spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud;

they kept the testimonies of the LORD

and the decree that the LORD gave them.

O LORD, our God, you answered them,

***you were a forgiving God to them,
but punishing their wrongdoing.***

Exalt the LORD, and bow down at the holy mountain of our God,
for the LORD, our God, is holy.

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 (Good News Translation)

This is a happy introduction to Paul's communication with the church in Thessalonica. We are unsure as to the issues that confronted this community, but it does seem that Paul's desire that these people continue to model themselves upon him and his team, is not about narcissism, but about his anxiety regarding the closing circles of fundamentalist groups that seek to reduce the Gospel to a series of tightly bound and rigid rules and regulations, apparently 'grounded' in Scripture. Paul continues to assert the radical generosity of God in Jesus Christ, evidence of a God that lives in active relationship with his people.

1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy—

To the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: may grace and peace be yours.

²We always thank God for you all and always mention you in our prayers. ³For we remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is firm. ⁴Our friends, we know that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own. ⁵For we brought the Good News to you, not with words only, but also with power and the Holy Spirit, and with complete conviction of its truth. You know how we lived when we were with you; it was for your own good. ⁶You imitated us and the Lord; and even though you suffered much, you received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. ⁷So you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸For not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing, then, that we need to say. ⁹All those people speak about how you received us when we visited you, and how you turned away from idols to God, to serve the true and living God ¹⁰and to wait for his Son to come from heaven—his Son Jesus, whom he raised from death.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 22:15-22 (Good News Translation)

Jenny Huckson

This famous piece of Scripture has been used and abused through the centuries, as perhaps no other, to justify either unquestioning obedience to the state, or a sort of bifurcated understanding of the world, divided neatly into religious and secular compartments, something that the Reformation sadly, tended to reinforce. This is the first in a series of scenarios where attempts are made to entrap Jesus (the word used for entrap refers to “hunting”) and where Jesus pushes back. Jesus response is as shrewd as is the initial question.

¹⁵ The Pharisees went off and made a plan to trap Jesus with questions. ¹⁶ Then they sent to him some of their disciples and some members of Herod's party. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you tell the truth. You teach the truth about God's will for people, without worrying about what others think, because you pay no attention to anyone's status. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what do you think? Is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, or not?”

¹⁸ Jesus, however, was aware of their evil plan, and so he said, “You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for paying the tax!”

They brought him the coin, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose face and name are these?”

²¹ “The Emperor's,” they answered.

So Jesus said to them, “Well, then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay to God what belongs to God.”

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

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

For Meditation: Be Thou my Vision, with a modern Celtic foundation (Audrey Assad, Slane, Gaelic, 8th century)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Optrm7IF16s>

Some Thoughts: Tax, Governance, Justice and the Kingdom

Hymn: Sing of the Lord's Goodness (TiS 183, The Lord's Goodness, Ernest Sands)

Let's Give: Our Offerings

(We place our offerings in the ceramic plate that depicts the "tree of life, a historical biblical image)

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Colin Bradford

At the end of each prayer/petition with the words, ***Lord Christ, hear our prayers*** we say, ***"Give us the courage to think and act***

The Australian Indigenous "Our Father" (The Our Father sung at the 2015 National Aboriginal Torres Strait Island Catholic Council Assembly in Darwin July 2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEnTJLskrgk>

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
We talk to you. Father you are good.

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
We talk to you. Father you are good.

We believe your word, Father,
We are your children, give us bread today.

We believe your word, Father,
We are your children, give us bread today.

We have done wrong, we are sorry,
Teach us, Father, all about your Word.

We have done wrong, we are sorry,
Teach us, Father, all about your Word.

Others have done wrong to us,
And we are sorry for them, Father, today.

Others have done wrong to us,
And we are sorry for them, Father, today.

Stop us from doing wrong, Father,
Save us all from the evil one.

Stop us from doing wrong, Father,
Save us all from the Evil One.

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
We talk to you, Father, you are good.

You are our Father, you live in heaven,
We talk to you, Father, you are good

Closing Hymn: We are marching (TiS 666, Siyahamba, South African traditional, tr. Anders Nyberg)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGOiANtGmhE>

Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos',
Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos',
Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos',
Siyahamba, ekukanyen' kwenkos',
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen' kwenkos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen' kwenkos'.

We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, we are marching, ooh,

We are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, we are marching, ooh,
We are marching in the light of God.

Blessing and Sending Out

The blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

**We listen and hum: Shalom to you (TiS 778, Somos del Señor,
Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)**

Musical Postlude

Organist:

John Hughes

