

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 22nd October, 2017

Welcome to Worship

9.00am Morning Communion

led by Rev Andrew Robinson

10.30am Café Church led by Doreen Hunt

6.00pm Town Close with Lesley Jackson

A Gathering Prayer from the Roots Resources

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar,
and all that fills it: for the Lord is coming.

Let the field exult, and everything in it: for the Lord is coming.

The trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord: for the Lord is
coming.

In his name we gather; in his name we sing our praises.

O Lord, we honour you for your glory and strength.

We praise you for your greatness.

We bless your name for the salvation you offer us.

We worship you and give you thanks.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Exodus 33 v12-23 Moses and the Glory of the Lord

“And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence ... you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live.’”

Psalm 99

“They called on the Lord and he answered them.”

1 Thessalonians 1 v1-10 Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians’ Faith

“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.”

Matthew 22 v15-22 Paying Taxes to Caesar

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

The Things That Are God’s

In this week’s reading from Matthew we hear how the Jewish leaders seek to entrap Jesus with a question about allegiance to the emperor and to God. Jesus counters with a carefully worded answer: give to each what they are due. The leaders are amazed at his teaching and leave him alone – for now.

In the Bible, often the location where the action takes place is significant. In Matthew’s account, for some time, much of the action is taking place in and around the Temple in Jerusalem. This is the place where the Davidic kings were anointed. The opening words of Matthew’s Gospel tell us, quite simply, that this is an account of ‘Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David’ (1 v1). It is at the Temple that Jesus’ claims are presented and examined: is he a revolutionary, or will he line up with the ruling elite? For the Jews at the time of Jesus, the Temple was all about stories and symbols of Israel and its relationship with God, God’s kingdom, slavery,

exodus, wars and ultimate freedom. In this edgy context, a question about taxes is far more than a cunning trick; it is all about power and identity. It asks Jesus, 'Who are you?' Note how the questioners begin by trying to big up Jesus' independence ("Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."). But by asking for a coin, Jesus draws them into the answer: they are revealed as being products of the system they participate in.

Jesus' answer is not simply a neat division of loyalties that need to be held in a delicate balance. It is possible that to 'give to Caesar' means 'pay him back for what he has done'; or it could simply mean 'pay your taxes' – it is ambiguous. Jesus' response seems to acknowledge the benefits of Roman rule – at the same time as rejecting its excesses, false deities and distorted priorities. The reality is, no one is a blank sheet. All people have expectations and are the products of the world they grow up in. The challenge, as Jesus demonstrates, is being able to respond honestly and with integrity to the competing demands the world makes on us. In this reading, there is a focus on the key players and we are asked us to look at who these people are. In Matthew, we meet both Pharisees and Herodians. The former represent the religious establishment. The latter are more problematic, but could be understood to represent the Romanising establishment. Both groups would have had an interest in the payment of taxes, but for very different reasons, and with different outcomes. Into this steps Jesus. The reading poses a question: who is the one whose authority is real – the Pharisees, the Herodians, or Jesus? And is everything and everyone who they appear to be?

Have you ever been to the library? There's an important rule for being there - be quiet so others can read.

And how about driving in the car? There are rules there too and those rules are so important for keeping us safe that, if we break them, we might get stopped by the police or put the lives of other road users at risk.

Our lives are full of rules and some of them are so important that they become laws - rules that everyone has to follow.

In today's Gospel story Jesus is asked a trick question: Whose rules does he follow? In other words, does he follow people's rules or God's?

How would you answer that question? Whose rules do you follow? Jesus wasn't tricked by that question. He explained in his own words that it's important to do both – but that we follow God's rules all the time.

So in the car we follow road rules, and we'll even whisper in the library, but we let God's rules guide us no matter where we are.

A Sending Out Prayer

Go, sing to the Lord, tell of his goodness.

Go, worship God through your actions;
and know that he is always with you.

We follow many rules in life, but none are more important than yours. Guide us as we work to be faithful followers during the week ahead.

Amen.