

**New St. James Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, October 18, 2020  
Rev. Mark McLennan**

**“SHOW ME THE MONEY!”**

Scriptures:

Proverbs 23:1-5

Psalm 99

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15–22

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It is not an election year in our country, or our province, but the virus has impacted how politics and government is being done in this country.

I don't know about you, but I am sick to death of political grandstanding.

Pontificating pundits.

Ineffective officials.

Pandering politicians.

Even in a non-election time, the sniping goes on – in our own country.

I am setting aside the secular circus going on down south.

The Rev. Dr. Christine Chakoian

For this, you can blame Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Almost 500 years ago, on October 31, 1517, the Catholic priest Martin Luther nailed 95 points of protest to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg.

His action against the corrupt papacy provoked the Protestant Reformation.

Twenty years later, John Calvin took Luther's idea of "the priesthood of all believers" to Geneva, Switzerland, where he introduced this radical idea of democracy.

For the first time, individuals would be responsible for electing their own civic government.

Fast forward another twenty years, when John Knox took Calvin's ideas to his native Scotland.

One hundred years later, Protestants carried these ideas across the ocean to the American colonies, seeking even greater religious and political liberty.

I love that King George III called the American Revolution "*that Presbyterian rebellion.*"  
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245 years later, what does that mean to us, I mean in Canada?

For one thing, it's helpful to remember that there was a time--there was a time we couldn't vote. When people were subjects, not citizens.

When princes ruled and we couldn't vote them in or out of office.

When we had no say.

As dreadful as our political process is sometimes, it beats the alternative by a long shot.

It is our privilege to participate in our own governance.

So, let's explore our Christian responsibility as citizens: what it means to "*render to God that which is God's and render to Caesar that which is Caesar's.*"

Let's start with rendering to **God** that which is **God's**.

One of the hallmarks of our faith is trust in the sovereignty of God:

- that in the end, everything belongs to God--the earth and all of its peoples are God's.

That means that we rest in the confidence that God's love and goodness will ultimately prevail.

And it means that there is nothing that is beyond God's reign: "*rendering to God that which is God's*" means rendering *everything* to God:

- putting all of our choices, all of our power, all of our relationships, all of our resources toward God's will.

For the Reformers, the sovereignty of God was the compass that guided them as they sought to follow the way of Jesus.

How important is this?

Well, let's see what happens when we render to human authorities that which we ought to be rendering to God.

Our reading from Proverbs warns us with this vivid line:

*"When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you have a big appetite."*

If you sat down with someone in power--a prince or a wealthy man--you were his guest. And once you were his guest, you were beholden to him.

The bigger the appetite--for his food or his favor--the more beholden you were.

That's why "*desiring the ruler's delicacies*" were "*deceptive food.*"

They came with strings attached.

And it's still true today: when we curry favor with those in power--political power or financial power or social standing--well, then, **we owe them.**

And once we are obligated, we run the risk of compromising our integrity.

You don't have to look far to see the fall-out of political corruption.

Proverbs reminds us that putting our desire for wealth ahead of God's sovereignty creates a similar disaster.

We can "*wear ourselves out seeking wealth,*" and the truth is, it is a fickle master.

It can disappear overnight--"*take wings*" and fly away, in the words of Proverbs.

Jesus said it this way: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and thieves break in and steal. ... Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness."

Rendering to God what is God's means seeking God's kingdom ahead of our own, serving God's sovereign will above other powers.

We know what the kingdom of God looks like:

- under God's reign, our world would be a place where every individual is treated as a child of God,
- instead of a place where just last year a girl like 15-year-old Malala Yousufzai gets shot for desiring education in Pakistan.

We know that's not God's sovereign will.

Rendering to God that which is God's presses us to put everything we have

--our resources, our time, our energy

--in service not to our personal gain but to God's will, that God's will can be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Rendering to God that which is God's presses us to do everything in our power to care for "*the least of these, my brothers and sisters,*" until every human being enjoys the dignity deserving those who are "*made in the image and likeness of God.*"

And rendering to God that which is God's even means that we vote not as people who are in it for ourselves, but first and foremost as Christians who seek God's will.

Therefore, the question before every election is never "*what's in it for me?*" but "*under whose leadership will God's sovereign will best flourish?*"

That's our first priority.

If that's what it means to "*render to God the things that are God's,*" then what does it mean to "*render to Caesar that which is Caesar's?*"

Let's start by understanding what government looked like in Jesus' day.

In his time, Caesar Augustus formalized the Imperial cult by designating himself--the Emperor--as a god.

Since Jews were to have no idols and worship no God but the Lord alone, paying taxes--literally "*tribute*"--to Caesar was dicey.

Worse, the rulers at that time were ruthless:

Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist,  
and Pontius Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' crucifixion.

But Jesus was clear:

- regardless of human failings, render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar.

The same thing was true in St. Paul's day under Emperor Nero, renowned for myriad executions (including those of his own mother and brother) and known for his brutal suppression of early Christians.

Nevertheless, St. Paul wrote to the Romans,  
"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.  
There is no authority except from God, and authorities that exist have been instituted by God."

And the same thing was still true at the Reformation when John Calvin had a bone to pick with the King of France.

His commentary on Jesus' words say this: "Those who destroy political order rebel against God."

What does that all mean for us?

No matter what happens in any election, our responsibility as Christians is to uphold our government

- not because they are good, because they will be human;
- not because they do our will, because they may or may not be of the stripe we desire.

We uphold the government because God desires order more than anarchy, and human governance is required for human flourishing.

But "rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's" also requires us to render the truth to Caesar and remind the government of its responsibility.

As Christians who render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, we owe it to the government to urge it towards its sacred calling.

Nancy Taylor, a minister at Old South Church in Boston, recalls the Puritan tradition of annual "Election sermons":  
from 1634 through 1884, pastors stood in the pulpit and addressed those just elected to office.

Taylor recounts the Election sermon of one long ago predecessor, Samuel Willard, on May 30, 1694.

In his pews are "'His Excellency the Governor, and the Honorable Counselors, and Assembly of the Representatives of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in New England."

Willard was among the few pastors who stood up to speak against the Salem witch trials and he prevailed.

Now, just a year after he brought to a stop those notorious executions, he stands to address the newly elected rulers.

This is what he says:

*"Ignorance is a Foundation for Error, and will likely produce it. ...  
[Those elected] must be above Flattery and Bribery, must hate Ambition and Covetousness, for if these Rule him, he will never be a just Ruler. ...  
[Above all,] he must be one who prefers the public Benefit above all private and separate Interests ... whatsoever."*

"Imagine," Taylor says, "imagine exchanging such a sermon for the jaunty music, celebratory confetti, and bright balloons with which we greet and fete today's newly elected politicians."

Election sermons may be a thing of the past, but we owe it to our rulers to remind them--and remind ourselves--what the sacred duty of government is.

Finally, when we "*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,*" we are called on to pray for and encourage those who govern

--maybe especially when we disagree with them.

SHOW ME THE MONEY!! Jesus said.

We belong to God, but Caesar is part our lives and our living, too.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, SAVIOUR AND SPIRIT...AMEN

## **Call to Worship**

Though there are rulers, presidents, kings, queens, God is the Lord of all life.

**In God we live and move and have our being.**

God requires our faithfulness and our service.

**We reach out to others with the same kind of love with which God has touched our lives.**

Come, let us worship the Lord who is always with us.

**Let us praise God who walks daily by our side. Amen.**

## **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

Holy God, the mystery of your presence stretches far beyond us, yet we know you draw near to us in Christ, walking beside us, guiding us with wisdom, loving us with boundless grace.

Your Spirit encourages us as we follow Christ and gives us the energy and insight we need to serve you.

Holy God, we are glad to gather in your presence, to be embraced by your mystery and your mercy. For we confess we do need your mercy.

We claim to be your people, but we forget to love as you do.

We claim to seek your guidance, but we often turn from your ways.

We ask for your forgiveness, but we fail to forgive as you forgive.

We claim to listen for your Word, but we ignore your wisdom.

Hear us as, in this silence, we offer you our personal confessions:

*(A time of silence is kept.)*

Forgive us, God of mystery and mercy, amend who we are and direct who you would have us be for the sake of Christ, our Saviour and Friend. AMEN

## **Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, the good news never gets old.

God knows us and loves us.

It is as much and as simple as that.

We are forgiven, loved, and set free to start again.

Thanks be to God!

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

God of our hearts and our hopes, As the season continues to change and harvests are gathered, we thank you for the beauty around us, for brilliant colours, birds flying south, the crackle of fallen leaves, and the rhythms of this time of year.

We are grateful for your steadfast love amid so much that changes.

This autumn, we also face unpredictable changes as the pandemic continues.

Draw close to those who find the uncertainty unsettling and help us preserve our connection to you and to each other.

God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

God of our imaginations and insights, We thank you for all the ways you inspire human minds to create things which improve the lives of your people.

We are grateful for all the medical efforts taken to manage COVID-19, and for the scientists testing vaccines. Give them perseverance and success.

Guide politicians and policy makers so that breakthroughs and resources are shared with the most vulnerable.

God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

God of neighbours and neighbourhoods, We praise you for everyone working to build and maintain healthy communities:

for teachers and librarians, healthcare workers, coaches, construction workers, farmers and labourers, store clerks and wait staff.

So many have had their workplaces changed and their livelihoods threatened by the pandemic. Give them perseverance and encouragement.

Make us good neighbours to all who serve our community and remind us to say thank you.

God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

God of comfort and compassion, We pray for all those who are struggling this autumn, whatever the reason.

We remember before you those facing illness or waiting for treatment...

those who have lost income and worry about winter expenses and shelter...

those who are grieving the loss of someone close...

and those whose mental health is under pressure these days...

Awaken your people around the world to attend to the needs of those at risk in our communities so that they will know your comfort and compassion

God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Now with gratitude for your love poured into the world through Christ Jesus, we pray as he taught us,

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come,*

*Your will be done, On earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.*

*Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil.*

*For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, Now and forever. Amen.*

### **PRESERVES AND BAKING MARKETPLACE**

Women's Council has organized a virtual Marketplace to replace the Christmas Bazaar which we will not be able to have this year. You are receiving a list of all the items that have been made, or are being made, by our members for you to purchase and enjoy. The baking will be fresh (except the items listed as frozen) and brought in just before you pick it up. You are welcome to tell your friends about the sale. Our aim is to sell out!

If you wish to order anything off the list of products, please call or email Karen Buchwald - 519-641-6742, [karenbuchwald@hotmail.com](mailto:karenbuchwald@hotmail.com). You may leave a message but be sure to leave your name and phone number. If you email, please include your phone number. Orders are taken on a first come first served basis and you may order now. Your orders will be confirmed. There is certainly a possibility that we could sell out of some things.

On Saturday, October 24, anytime between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., you will come to the Oxford Street parking lot where you will be greeted outside while you remain in your car. You will give your name and someone will get your order for you. You will pay that person and then be on your way! If you do not have transportation available to do this pickup, please tell Karen when you place your order.

Thank you for your support, Women's Council

### **BENEDICTION**

Go now as those who have found favour in the sight of God.

Be imitators of Jesus Christ and an example to all of the life of faith.

To the world in which you live, give your love and service,

and to God, give all that you are and all that you shall be.

May the glory of God's goodness be revealed to you;  
May the grace and peace of Jesus Christ take root in you;  
May the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fill you with joy.  
AMEN