

Home Service for October 18, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Hear God's call to be more than we have become. Be inspired anew to live in God's service.

Call to Worship:

May the nations quake and the peoples tremble. God sits enthroned in the heavens, bringing justice and righteousness. May the mountains tremble and the seas roar. God's glory is stronger than the foundation of the earth. May the humble seek the living God. God's goodness and mercy sustain the faithful in times of trial. Come, let us worship the Lord.

Opening Prayer:

Loving, living God, be among us now. Show us your ways. Guide our steps. Live in us, that we may be people of steadfast hope and powerful giving. Help us hear your words, challenging us to give you all the things that are yours. Help us remember that all we are and all we have are gifts from you, gifts to be shared in service and love. Holy One among us, help us be a holy people who receive your word with joy and live your message with love. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of Grace, we know that you have chosen us, but we often forget that you have also chosen others. You call us to be imitators of Christ, yet many times we are imitators of the world. You challenge us to turn from our idols, but we are tempted to turn back to them again and again. Rescue us, Lord, from ourselves. Show us your way. Guide our every action, that we may live as you call us to live. In Jesus name, Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Beloved children of God, receive this good news: God loves us, chooses us, Forgives us, and renews us to live in love and service of God and neighbor. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Read Psalm 99

The Lord reigns,
let the nations tremble;
he sits enthroned between the cherubim,
let the earth shake.

² Great is the Lord in Zion;
he is exalted over all the nations.

³ Let them praise your great and awesome name—
he is holy.

⁴ The King is mighty, he loves justice—
you have established equity;
in Jacob you have done
what is just and right.

⁵ Exalt the Lord our God
and worship at his footstool;
he is holy.

⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel was among those who called on his name;
they called on the Lord
and he answered them.

⁷ He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.

⁸ Lord our God,
you answered them;
you were to Israel a forgiving God,
though you punished their misdeeds. ^[a]

⁹ Exalt the Lord our God
and worship at his holy mountain,
for the Lord our God is holy.

Prayers of the People:

Our hearts are filled, O Lord, with your joy and peace. You have placed your imprint on us and challenged us to be your people in thought, word and deed. In gratitude we come to you this day, bringing shouts of joy as well as cries of sorrow. We are concerned about so many of our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are afflicted with illness of many kinds, who mourn, who feel lost and alone and wonder where you are. We have raised their names before you in prayer that your healing love may be poured on them. Lord, we know that you hear and respond to our prayers for these dear ones. Likewise, gracious God, we shout

with joy at the many blessings that have been poured into our lives and into the lives of our family and friends. Our hearts rejoice at the delight they feel. Help us to understand that these blessings are your wondrous gifts of joy for each one of us. We have lifted the names and situations which reveal to us your loving presence with us. We thank you for all these blessings. Help us to bring words of healing and hope to all we meet, for it is in Jesus' name that we pray. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

¹⁴ The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

¹⁹ 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. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

²¹ Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silas^[a] and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.

³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters^[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you,

⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^[a] to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹ “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.”

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

Message

As you read today’s Gospel, you can almost feel that the air being thick with tension! Jesus had entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey amidst the shouts of

hosannas. He had gone to the temple and drove out the moneychangers and merchants, to the dismay of the chief priests and elders. No longer could his ministry be relegated to some distant phenomenon that was taking place in the small towns and countryside in the region of Galilee. Jesus had brought his teachings and ministry into the center of Israel's faith. He had brought it to the temple itself. Into the tension that already existed between Israel and the Roman occupation, it polarized the people in regard to Jesus. Although many of the common people viewed Jesus as a prophet, others, especially those who held positions of power and authority, viewed Jesus' teachings and actions as subversive and inflammatory.

So, the Pharisees began plotting to entrap Jesus. When you think about it, the trap could not have been better staged. For Matthew tells us that the Pharisees took with them some Herodians. The Pharisees and the Herodians were on opposite sides of the issue that they planned to put before Jesus, so whatever side he chose it would be the wrong side. The Pharisees were devout Jews who strove to live by the law of Moses, and as a result of their piety of faith, they were critical of the Roman oppression, especially to the idea of paying taxes to support Caesar, since they considered him to be evil. After all, Caesar considered himself to be divine, and what pious Jew could bring himself to support such a blasphemer through their taxes. The Herodians, on the other hand, were supporters of Herod, and tended to support Rome from whom Herod gained his authority. They were a group of Jews who had compromised their faith and piety, in order to win favors from the governing forces. Thus, the Herodians were in favor of paying taxes to Rome.

So, these two groups, representing both sides in the tension that existed between Rome and Israel, come together to confront Jesus. They even tried to sweeten Jesus up for the kill. Just listen to their hypocrisy! "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality." Although all of this is true, coming from the mouths of those who set out to entrap Jesus, sort of leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

Then came the question. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Their trap had been set. If Jesus answered "No," the Herodians, who enjoyed the benefit of Roman rule, would report him to the authorities as a traitor. If Jesus answered "Yes," the Pharisees would have ample fuel to discredit him among the people as a Roman sympathizer, a person unfaithful to Israel.

But Jesus saw through their ploy to entrap him, and their flattery. And Jesus had the wisdom to escape their trap. So, he asked to see the coin used to pay the tax. Jesus was handed a denarius, a small silver coin of Roman issue. This coin would

have had a portrait of the reigning emperor crowned with a laurel wreath, the sign of divinity. It also had the inscription, “Tiberius Caesar, majestic son of the majestic God, and High Priest.”

Can you see why the question of paying taxes to Rome was such an issue at that time? Even the coin that was used to pay the tax, not only bore the image of Caesar, it also claimed him to be divine. For the Pharisees, and for the early Christians, it was viewed as paying homage to Caesar, akin to acknowledging him as divine; a denial of their faith.

Of course, the Herodians, who may not have acknowledged Caesar to be divine, overlooked the inscription, in favor of the political benefits that they received from Rome. Even though they may have professed to be children of Israel, they adapted to the ways of the world, and in the process, compromised their faith.

So, Jesus asks those who tried to entrap him, “Whose head is this, and whose title? They answered, ‘The emperor’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” And Matthew tells us that “when they heard this, they were amazed, and went away.”

Jesus turned the table on both sides of the issue, and challenged both the Pharisees and the Herodians; without answering the question. For the Pharisees, who found the inscription on the coin that Rome had issued to be so offensive to their faith, he simply said, give it back to Caesar. And to the Herodians, who had compromised their faith in order to gain political favor and power, he said, give to God the things that belong to God.

However, the fact that Jesus was able to avoid the entrapment that the Pharisees and Herodians posed to Jesus, does not resolve the tension for us. In fact, his response only serves to lift our awareness of the tension in which we must live our lives, we as citizens live lives of Two Kingdoms, earthly and heavenly.

The first part of his answer tells us that even as people of faith, who are heirs of the kingdom of God through our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, we have a responsibility to return to Caesar the things that are Caesars. In other words, as long as we are citizens of this world, we have a responsibility to the governing authorities of our nation, our state, our county and our community. And I believe that Jesus means more than simply paying our taxes, in support of the various benefits that result from living as a citizen of our country. Governments also ask for our allegiance. Governments have the right to establish laws to regulate our life as we live in community with one another, and to have the authority to enforce them. They may even, in the time of war, ask us to come to the defense of our country by serving in the armed forces.

As disciples of Christ, who have been redeemed by his death and resurrection, we must acknowledge that we are children of God's kingdom, to which our ultimate allegiance belongs. After all, God is the source of our very existence, to whom we owe our very life. If we are to "give to God the things that are God's," then we can only conclude that we owe God, and God alone our worship and praise for his gift of creation, for our life and all that sustains it, and his grace that has redeemed us and claimed us as his own.

Thus, Jesus' response to the question that was meant to entrap him, actually traps us all! We live as citizens of two kingdoms; an earthly kingdom, to which we owe certain allegiances, and a heavenly kingdom, to which we owe everything. Jesus' response doesn't really settle the dispute between the Herodians and the Pharisees, any more than it settles the conflict that each of us encounters, as we try to live out our faith today. Jesus invites us into the struggle. He invites us to acknowledge that our government has a right to expect a certain allegiance from us, but that we should never allow our government to distort or compromise our faith and allegiance to God. Jesus' answer says "Give to Caesar what belongs to him, but no more than what belongs to him."

I have seen our government move away from the moral fabric supported by the Judeo-Christian faith. And I have seen, even within the church, this struggle, this tension between our allegiance to the state, and our allegiance to God, being manifest. The fact is, as Christians, we will always be in the midst of this struggle, this tension of living in two kingdoms. And since Jesus did not answer the question, I cannot. But I pray that God's Spirit might lead us all to first come to acknowledge that to God belongs our first allegiance, and upon this, the Spirit might lead us to take our faith seriously. For upon this, the future of our eternal life rests.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, you sent your Son into our world to reveal your will for our lives and to redeem us from sin and death. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to embrace Jesus in faith, that we might truly be his disciples, and acknowledge him as our Lord and Savior. Above all, guide us in our lives, as we struggle to live with the tension of belonging to two kingdoms. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Benediction:

May God bless you with the assurance that you are chosen children of God, empowered and equipped by the Spirit to live as the Family of God in a world in desperate need of the good news. Amen.