

The Rev. Jay Lawlor “We Belong to God” Sermon for the 20th Sunday After Pentecost, October 22, 2017

The Rev. Jay Lawlor preached and presided at Grace Episcopal Church, Muncie, IN.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, US, February 27, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Rev. Jay Lawlor](#) preached the [sermon](#) titled “We Belong to God” for the 20th Sunday After Pentecost, Year A on October 22, 2017 while visiting Grace Episcopal Church in Muncie, Indiana. The readings for the Lectionary were Isaiah 45:1-7; Psalm 96:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; and Matthew 22:15-22.



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The Rev. Jay Lawlor

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians [...] (Matthew 22:15-16a NRSV) From the very beginning of today’s passage from Matthew, we know that the

Pharisees are trying to set a trap for Jesus. They even try to create a perfect trap by including the Herodians. A temporary alliance of adversaries. Both opponents of Jesus, but the two groups did not like each other.

Pharisees were religious purists. The Torah was very important to them. They opposed paying taxes to the pagan Roman regime, especially because Caesar claimed divine lineage. The Herodians supported Herod, Israel’s ruler, who served at the pleasure of Rome. But Jesus was a threat to both groups, so they conspire to entrap him with a question about paying taxes to Caesar.

There were strong feelings about paying taxes to Rome, and differing opinions depending upon the group one was associated with. So the debate about paying taxes to the emperor – the question posed to Jesus, was not theoretical. And the answer could have dire consequences.

This was a seemingly genius plot to entrap Jesus. No matter how Jesus answered, he would be in trouble with either Rome or the Pharisees. If Jesus objected to paying the tax, Rome could arrest him. If Jesus consented to paying the tax, the Pharisees could charge he was breaking the Torah. This was especially tricky because the coin contained the image of Caesar – which could be seen as idolatry according to Jewish Law, and the inscription on the coin read: “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, Son of divine Augustus.” More than a little problematic to be complicit in such a pagan claim by using the coin to pay the tax.

The Pharisees and Herodians had devised the perfect trap – or so they thought. They begin by offering false praise to Jesus, thinking they will more easily lure him into the trap: “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.” (Matthew 22:16b NRSV)

Then they ask the question that they believe Jesus can offer no good answer: “Tell us, then, what you

think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (Matthew 22:17 NRSV) In asking 'is it lawful?', there are two things going on. Hence, why it seems such a clever trap. The Pharisees are asking if paying the tax to the emperor is in keeping with the Torah. A tax they argue is not in keeping with the Torah. The Herodians would be asking if one should obey the Roman law to pay taxes to the emperor. The Herodians, likely with assistance from Roman soldiers, are ready to arrest Jesus if he advocates for not paying the tax to Caesar.

Jesus sees right through their scheme. He knows it is a trap. And Jesus's next move is brilliant. He asks to see the coin used to pay the tax. His response after seeing the coin is a clever avoidance of the trap. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:20-21 NRSV)

The full transcript of the Rev. Jay Lawlor's sermon is available at <https://www.therevjaylawlor.com/we-belong-to-god-sermon-by-the-rev-jay-lawlor-20-pentecost-year-a-oct-22-2017/>

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