

“Surrender”
God, Nations and the Way of Christ

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.

“I surrender all.” I surrender all, I surrender all, All to Jesus, blessed savior. I surrender all.

I love that hymn. I feel relief when I sing it, but we have come through a political season, and it’s not quite over, and that surrender is not a word that a politician would appreciate, not in these bitterly fought campaigns.

But in the context of Christ's words to us today, surrender is not about defeat but of acceptance of that which is greater than ourselves, that to which we belong.

Last Tuesday night, election night, I went to bed late, and woke up the next morning, still exhausted, decided to stay away from the news on the radio, television, internet,

Instead, I worked through the days, had evening meetings, watched Casablanca, and walked my dog, watching as a deer loped through the neighborhood and geese flew south.

The moon rose high one evening and disappeared the next. The stars and planets in their courses, were bright and beautiful. I had no longing to hear the news, and realized that regardless of who won, the 2024 campaign would almost immediately begin but what the night sky and loping deer showed me that while politics seems endless but it is not eternal.

It is helpful to take night walks to remember that, but also to go to our scriptures.

When the Hebrew people settled into the land God raised up judges who listened to God. To help the people discern right from wrong.

The elders went to Judge Samuel and said, *You are old, appoint a king to lead us. That we may be like all other nations, and our king may judge us and fight our battles.*

Samuel warned them, *I shall find you a king, but he shall send **you** to battle and take from **you** what he wants.*

There would be good kings like David, and terrible kings, like Herod,

Sometime, perhaps in the 7th Century BC these words were written during King Josiah's time as a sort of code, laws that supersede any one king.

¹² And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? ¹⁴ To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. . ¹⁸ the Lord defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ²⁰ Fear and serve the LORD your God. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name.

But the Kings of Israel wouldn't keep to that code, and ones like Herod, would eventually surrendered their real authority to the Roman Empire and like Samuel warned, Rome took what it wanted, including an "imperial tax" that the people of Israel paid to fund their own occupation

Who shall you pay tribute, Jesus, asked the Pharisees? to Caesar or to God?

Now the coin they handed Jesus was one like this, with the face and name of the emperor on one side and the words *Maximus Pontif -Highest Priest*, on the other, blasphemy to the Jews. The coin they would use to pay the imperial tax.

If Jesus advises paying it, His fellow believers will condemn him, if he advises not, he will be charged with sedition

Now Jesus knows what is endless and what is eternal. *Give to Caesar's what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God*, he says.

Our most ancient Christian scholar, 3rd century, Tertulian, gave this interpretation, and it is still ours today:

that coins on which is inscribed the image of a king may belong to the king, but human beings who are made in the image of God and so belong to God.

Jesus invites us as well to remember that beyond party or president or country, even beyond parent or spouse or children lies another, more profound identity. The one drawn with water upon our forehead.

Jesus says, you, your deepest self, that part that is eternal, belongs to God alone and the beauty and mystery and wonder of it all is that not only do we belong to God, God belongs to us. That God claims us, God claims you, one day God will take you by the hand and show you, But for now, we are simply called to remember in whose image we are made and that Jesus, who was one of us, invites us to be like him, says we can.

We can love one another, love our enemies, we can forgive 70 times 7, we can seek and offer redemption and blessing.

Let us pray:

Dear one who gives us life and breath we thank you for the one in whom we see you most clearly who reminds us that we belong to you, and you accept us, as we are, and lead us to who we can be.

So, in our hearts we kneel before you, in surrender.

Sing with me in your hearts.

All to Jesus I surrender
Make me Savior wholly Thine
Let me feel the Holy Spirit
Truly know that Thou art mine

I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Saviour
I surrender all

Amen.

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