

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 21st Sunday After Pentecost - October 18, 2026

00:08

[Music]

00:25

with the week that some of you have had with colds and flu and other things.

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That's no small thing, is it? You can be back among us.

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That does remind me when we come to the sharing of the piece

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that if you are preferring to do something other than handshake,

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maybe just a nod or a bow would suffice.

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Especially good for me because you know I'm going to lope up to you and stick out the mitt.

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And if you would prefer not to shake hands today

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flu reasons that you might have, just I will try to watch you and follow your lead.

01:02

Today's gospel reading is a difficult one. It's one we think we know but we

01:06

don't. Well, I don't. I'm still wrestling with it. I'm going to do something a

01:12

little odd. I'm going to tell a joke to introduce the gospel reading. Now most of

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you know I don't do humor so people yeah no it's a story yeah yeah you could be

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the judge of whether this is humorous or not it was told to me as a joke so

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whether it comes out as such well we'll just find out but there were three

01:36

creatures they can be TV if you want them to be and they got together to talk

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about how they distribute their offering so a certain amount would go to them

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personally and the rest would go directly to God. So either you've heard

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this joke or you see where it's going. So a circle is drawn, the first pastor says,

01:58

and I take the offering basket with all the coin and cash and check and I throw

02:04

it up in the air and whatever falls near me God gets. Whatever falls outside the

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circle I get. The second preacher says, "Well that's really interesting because I

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use that circle and throw method too but when I do it the money that falls

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inside the circle God gets and whatever falls outside I scoop that up." And the

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third preacher after a bit of a pause says, "Yes I do the circle and throw

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method too but here's how I do it. When I throw the money up whatever God can grab

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God gets and then I get the rest. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what

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is God's has nothing to do with revenue sharing or taxes or anything like that.

03:01

So here's the verse that Jesus speaks that I hope you will carry with you.

03:07

where your treasure is, there your heart is also. I think that'll help us navigate

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what is, I think, a fairly tricky gospel reading today.

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[MUSIC]

03:52

[Music]

04:05

Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 22nd chapter. The Pharisees went and

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plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said, so they sent their disciples to him with

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the Herodians saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of

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God in accordance with truth and show deference to no one, for you do not

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regard people with partiality. Tell us then what do you think? Is it lawful to

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pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you

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putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And

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and they brought him a denarius and he said to them, "Whose head is this and

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whose title?" And they answered, "Caesar's." And then Jesus said to them, "Give

therefore

05:11

to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And

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when they heard this they were amazed and they left him and went away. The word

05:26

of our lord.

The Sermon

05:29

or should be seated.

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Grace and peace to you from the one who gives us every good and perfect gift.

05:48

Okay, it's not About Profit Sharing, it's not About Taxes, it's Not even About Deaf Debate.

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So what is it about?

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Maybe that scene where Jesus asks someone to produce a coin, the Galilean equivalent of what's in your wallet.

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Maybe we should look at that a minute.

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Interesting that people of a religious party

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and of a secular party who really didn't care

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for the empire all that much, carried the same coin.

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This denarius, this day's wage that had the figure

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of Caesar and the inscription.

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Now there were many in religious circles

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who believed that an engraved image was like idolatry.

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was forbidden and yet the coin bears the face and it also bears the words Caesar

07:00

is Lord. That's what this is about. It is about where is our heart, where is our

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true loyalty.

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And you think that's an easy thing to deal with?

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The reality is we all live in a world where we like to eat regularly and live indoors and

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be part of society and how do we do that except through

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means of exchange, money that

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we all recognize is

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our currency.

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If we take the question about paying taxes and flipping on its head, it's then that maybe

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we get a little more of a sense of what's at stake.

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What if the question were, is it legal to not pay taxes?

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how loyal to the Emperor do you want to be and how loyal do you want to be to the society

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you're in and how much are you going to buy into the society you live in. I see there

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are some philosophers and professors among us so I'm doing this part without a license

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So just know that you're standing by just in case I really tank on this, so thank you.

08:43

The distinction between law, legality, and morality, and ethics.

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They're not always the same thing.

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They don't overlap nicely like the middle of a Venn diagram, do they?

09:02

There are countries where slavery is legal.

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There are countries where honor killings are not only legal, they are condoned and almost

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insisted upon. There are countries where racial segregation is legal. But I think many of us

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say these points of legality are not points of morality. They're not really in

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accordance with the rule of the realm of God. And so there may be times when a

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government or a society says, "Well that's legal." And maybe we have to say something

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else.

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And where does that leave us exactly?

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I mean, there are some who have chosen to withdraw from society completely.

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There are those who have protested peacefully or even not peacefully.

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And there are those of us who maybe just try to keep our heads down and get along.

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Not much different than the people of Jesus' day.

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Not much different than the people of Matthew's day either.

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[BLANK_AUDIO]

10:26

There are times when maybe we do want to say, no, this isn't right.

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And to speak out against things that are unjust, or maybe even to vote with our

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wallets, but that's tricky too.

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And I think that's really what I hope happens in this sermon today,

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is rather than trotting out some absolutes and surefire ways to live faithfully and

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manage to survive the society you live in. This is more of an invitation to say, as I think the Gospel reading invites,

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to think about this stuff a little bit more and to not be so quick

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to assume that we have it right and somebody else hasn't run,

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or to swallow the Empire's agenda feathers and all.

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This is tricky stuff, and I think this is why at creation, God implanted in us,

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hearts and minds and some sort of world compass.

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And sometimes we have to use them.

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So, when I order from Amazon,

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and the truck arrives before I even know what I want,

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that's pretty slick.

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I don't really like the fact that the profit sharing in that corporation all goes to pretty

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much one person and that there are drivers and subcontractors who aren't even being paid

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minimum wage.

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And when my more fiery friend's boycott, "Don't do it," well, that sort of appeals to me,

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but I'm not able to do it for a really long time, unfortunately.

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And I don't think that makes my position all that morally

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denable, if I'm honest.

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But it does, I think, illustrate the ambiguity of living

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in a world where sometimes it's hard to spot.

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Because I think if I were to boycott every company

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and every everything that I had some objection to,

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I am just arrogant and opinionated enough,

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I wouldn't do business with anybody.

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Well, maybe three or four people, but not very many.

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A number of years ago,

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I got a really great deal on a shirt from Walmart.

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I was so happy.

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And then I thought about,

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"Oh, who made this shirt?

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Was this made by a company that pays its people

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or a sweatshop?"

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Silly me, I actually wrote a moment to ask.

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And they wrote back.

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And they said, well, yes, we do try

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to pay attention to the supply chain.

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And we do try to do things ethically as best we can,

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but there are things that slip by us, too.

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I thought that was a modest answer.

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And maybe that is kind of where we are as well,

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is that we do our best to live honorably and ethically.

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We do our best to speak out when we see things

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that are patently wrong.

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But how, then, do we really ascribe to Caesar

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or to society the things that are their prerogative

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to legislate?

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And how then do we ascribe to God those things that are God's?

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Sometimes it's murky, but I think sometimes it's

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pretty straightforward.

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I'll give you a couple of examples

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from Jesus' own preaching, where when he sets up

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the sort of society that he would advocate,

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The kingdom of God, we call it.

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I'm going to tell you something that's very familiar, right?

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That God blesses the poor.

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God comforts those who are born.

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That there's a special place in the heart and mind of God

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for people who live day to day, people of the earth,

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and sometimes people who are crushed under the weight

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of unjust forces, whatever they may be.

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That there are those who will find mercy because they've shown mercy.

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That there are those who actively wage peace who will be reckoned children of God.

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I think that's the template for rendering to God that which is God's.

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Jesus is quite a storyteller.

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And the last one that he tells in Matthew's Gospel, I want to lift up today as part of this,

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"Well, how do we render to Caesar, and how do we render to God?"

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And we're not talking about 50/50/64 East Blitz.

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We're talking about different domains, I think.

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And that particularly shows up in this story that Jesus tells,

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that societies and countries and nations will be judged,

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and this will be the litmus test.

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How did we respond when we saw somebody hungry, somebody parched a thirst,

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somebody who's ill, somebody who's not from around here trying to make their

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way, the forerunner if you will. What about those who are unjustly oppressed

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by a government that says it's legal?

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How do we respond to those things?

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Now we are not nations, we are not whole societies, but we are within them, are we not?

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And so maybe it comes down to our own individual discernment about what spirit might lead you to do in particular.

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To live in these ways that Jesus articulates and spells out not only in

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list form, but in story form.

17:01

There's a line that maybe we can walk around with this week and

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it's not the answer

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necessarily.

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But I think it's a way to live the question. It's a quote my favourite poet, Reiner Rilke.

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Here's the quote.

17:27

"You can be in the world, but you don't have to be of the world."

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And so, my prayer is this, church, as society, and as people,

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that God guides us as we work out this really odd calculus

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of rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's and rendering to God that which belongs to God.

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Blessings as you fuss with all of that.

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Amen