

PENTECOST 18

October 16, 2011

Text: Matt. 22:15-22

Theme: "We're Only Passing Through"

It seems to be that we have a couple of big problems in life. One is that we forget that this world is not really our home because heaven is our home. So we begin treating life here as the most important thing and heaven as something to think about later. The second problem is related to the first. We forget who is in charge. So we begin trying to orchestrate everything in our lives instead of handing it over to the maestro and just relaxing with the music he provides.

In our Gospel for today, there is no dichotomy between God and Caesar. The people who are talking to Jesus are trying to draw a false distinction between the earthly ruler and the heavenly King. They want it that way so that they can more easily forget that this world is not their home and that they are not in charge. God allows Caesar to serve as leader. It is only by God's allowance that any leader serves on this earth. Good leaders and bad serve only because God allows it including King David, Adolph Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln and Barach Obama. What they do with the privilege God gives them is between them and God. But regardless of how good or how bad they are, we do not divide our loyalties between any leader and God because the leader is at God's disposal. Of course when a leader commands us to do something ungodly, we would be compelled to obey God and not man because it is God who is in charge, not some earthly leader. When you understand the order of things, the question of "do you serve your earthly leader or do you serve God," is a non-sense question. One cannot serve God by disobeying an earthly leader. God put that leader where he is and fully expects us to honor and obey him as we would God himself, unless...

unless that earthly leader commands us to disobey God. At this point, he abandoned the one who supplies his power and we are bound by conscience to obey God, not a human being.

The whole problem arises because of our works righteousness and our attempt to grab control of everything. We want to earn our salvation by paying appropriate tribute to God in the form of worship, offerings, and works etcetera. All of the tribute, folks, has already been paid. Christ rendered unto God his life and his soul for our sakes. Do you believe that the life and soul of Jesus Christ were enough? It is more than a human being could ever produce in a hundred lifetimes, so there is nothing left to pay.

Now we serve God while we are passing through this life by serving our community. That is what the whole second table of the law is all about, commandments 4-10, love your neighbor. We pay our taxes. We give our offerings to support the work of the church in our communities locally and globally. We do good works for the benefit of our neighbor not because we have to but because God allows us to. He gives us the privilege of giving to others and being a little bit like him. We have many meaningful things to do as we make our way through this foreign land on our way to our eternal home. But remember, we're only passing through. Don't get too comfortable. There is no point in building anything permanent in this world because this world is doomed. It is passing away. It will soon be consumed with fire.

There is a constant temptation, however, to begin believing that this world is what matters. That is the Devil's ploy. DISTRACT! DISTRACT! DISTRACT! He cannot touch us unless he can get us to walk away from God under our own power.

So he does whatever he can to encourage us to make ungodly choices. We begin sacrificing the important things in life to attain the unimportant. No one is going to care in heaven whether you made Vice-President before you retired but if you let your faith die you will be spending eternity in Hell away from God, your family and your friends. You are not going to care in paradise whether you were completely happy and fulfilled during your generally less than 100 years on earth, but if you let your faith die while you pursue pleasure, you will spend eternity in Hell rueing that ridiculous choice and paying the eternal price for killing your faith in exchange for a few years of pleasure.

Maybe you are an amazingly deep and faithful person, but I know from my personal experience that it only takes a short time for me to be away from God's Word and Sacrament before I start to make bad spiritual decisions. That is why regular worship and reception of the sacrament are so important. That is what keeps us focused. This life is not the main thing and we are not in charge here, even if we are a vice-president or some other Grand PooBah in the world.

On the other hand, as our faith is strengthened by God's Word and Sacrament, we more firmly grasp the whole truth of life. Then we may, as our prayer of the day suggests, "pass through things temporal and lose not the things eternal."