

The Vine at Home
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Call to worship

We draw near to you in worship
with this offering of praise,
our prayers for those in need
and our lives dedicated to your service.

Bless this time of fellowship,
and may the blessing we receive
be the gift that we share
as we leave this place. Amen.¹

Hymn: 81 STF – Now thank we all our God

Opening Prayers

Let us pray, As we gather in worship today let us reflect on the week we have had, on what we have given and what we have taken from it.

[silence]

Lord you give us so much, our family and friends, our churches and communities. You give us hope and comfort. You walk with us through the dark times and rejoice with us in the good.

In this moment, we offer you our thanks for all you have given us this week.

[silence]

Lord, all you ask is that we give to you what is yours. That we use the gifts you have given us for the good of your world. In the silence, let us reflect on our gifts and how we have used them this week.

[silence]

Lord, we are sorry for when we do not give our all in worship or service and keep our gifts to ourselves. Remind us in this moment to use our gifts for the common good.

[silence]

Lord, as we enter this time of worship, help us to reflect on how to give you praise through our worship and service. Inspire us to share your gifts and use them to build your kingdom on earth. Amen.²

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Rachel Allison

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Matthew 22:15-22 - The Question about Paying Taxes

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "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. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹ 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." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.³

Reflections on the reading:

What are things you really don't like doing but you know you have to? Maybe some of those things relate to the COVID-19 restrictions. We may not like having to wear a face-covering (if we medically can) or not being able to sing if we are able to be in a church building. We may even disagree with these restrictions. But it is our civic duty to comply with them.

Perhaps that is what Jesus is getting at in our gospel reading for today. People then, like us, were living in the time between God's kingdom coming to earth in the person and ministry of Jesus, and that kingdom being fully on earth as it is in heaven. In the meantime, they, like us, had to comply with the rules put in place by earthly rulers.

Or maybe it's more than that. The coins the Jewish people had to pay in taxes to their Roman oppressors bore the image of the emperor. It meant that the coins literally belonged to the emperor and so maybe Jesus is saying 'give the coins back to the emperor because they belong to him but give to God what belongs to God'.

So, what does belong to God? 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1). We are called to give to God what belongs to God by valuing and caring for God's creation. We are called to give to God what belongs to God by valuing and caring for ourselves as people made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). We are called to give to God what belongs to God by valuing and caring for others as all humanity bears God's image.

Maybe there is a way of doing our civic duty – whether we agree with it or not – while also giving to God what is God's. Wearing a face-covering (if we medically can) and not singing in church is required of us by law but is also a way of valuing and caring for others by reducing their risk to COVID-19. Allowing our buildings to be used by others, even if we're not using them ourselves for worship, is a way of valuing and caring for others, especially during this pandemic – perhaps as a foodbank, or as a venue for a flu clinic.

Perhaps our response to doing what civic authorities and God require of us is a matter of grace – particularly when we may not agree with what is being asked of us and especially at

times like now when things can feel so challenging. May God's Spirit help us receive and to show grace. Amen. ⁴

You may like to consider these questions this week from the Methodist Way of Life:

1. How are you caring for yourself?
2. How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond? What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?
3. How are you caring for God's creation?

Hymn: 440 STF – Amazing Grace

Prayers of intercession

God of mercy and grace, we know that we can come to you each morning to bring our requests and our prayers to lay them before you.

We are astounded at your great mercy, for we know how your standards for our behaviour are so high and yet you are prepared to listen to our prayers.

You are troubled by the wickedness of the world; you do not approve of boasting, telling lies, or deceit of any kind.

You will judge those who cause harm to others and all who do wrong in your sight.

Yet, although we know that there are such times in our own lives, we also know that if we are truly sorry, we can come before you to ask for forgiveness, and that you will look on us with grace and love and mercy and give us the chance to put the wrong behind us and to start again.

Then we ask that you will lead us on in our lives, forgiven and renewed and having learned yet another lesson about our own weaknesses.

God of mercy and grace, we turn from you again to face the work you have given us to do in your world. Amen.⁵

Hymn: 713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Blessing

We go from this moment refreshed and renewed,
We go with a fresh encounter with the living God in our hearts,
We go to seek a better world where justice and peace reign, Amen.⁶

⁴ Reflection written by James Morley

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

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⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker