

SCRIPTURE READING FOR NOVEMBER 6, 2022 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Matthew 22:15-40
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

15 **THEN** the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] 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 Caesar 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, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar'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.

23 The same day some Sadducees came to him saying there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question: **24** "*Teacher*, Moses said, 'If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.' **25** Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. **26** The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. **27** Last of all, the woman

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of the four gospels. Gospel means good news, it's the title given to the four books in the Bible that tell the life, actions, and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It was composed in Greek, probably sometime after 70 CE, with evident dependence on the earlier Gospel According to Mark.

THEN :: Our series of three encounters takes place in the middle of several chapters of parables told by Jesus (Matthew 18-25). In the previous chapter Jesus entered the capital city of Jerusalem and went to the Temple where he overturned the tables of the moneychangers – a public act of protest and call to reform/revolution that was simultaneously religious, political and economic. In that time there were several diverse religious factions (which were also political and economic) including the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and Scribes: they all had different ways to respond to national identity while being part of the Roman Empire and how to practice their ancient faith in their contemporary moment. Here, in today's text, they come to respond to Jesus and his public critic of their authority and leadership.

Pharisees :: The most often cited in the gospels of these religious factions at the time of Jesus' life. They are the spiritual fathers of modern (rabbinical) Judaism, and what we might call fundamentalists. They had a strong insistence on the Oral Law that God gave to Moses at Sinai along with the Torah. The Torah, or Written Law, was akin to the U.S. Constitution in the sense that it set down a series of laws that were open to interpretation. The Pharisees believed that God also gave Moses the knowledge of what these laws meant and how they should be applied. This oral tradition was codified and written down roughly three centuries later in what is known as the Talmud. They were zealous in observing the law as the way in which they obeyed God and practiced their faith. They believed that being holy was to remain apart from sinners: those who don't observe God's Law and in particular the foreign Roman occupiers. They believed in an after-life (resurrection), and in a messiah who would herald an era of world peace, & deliverance of Israel from foreign domination. Most NT scholars believe that the Pharisees were not that far from the teachings of Jesus, which is maybe why Jesus pushes them so hard and seems to be their enemy in the gospel narratives.

HERODIANS:: Like the Pharisees, the Herodians wanted political independence for the Jewish people. Unlike the Pharisees, who sought to restore the kingdom of David, the Herodians wished to restore a member of the Herodian dynasty to the throne in Judea.

Teacher:: they address Jesus as teacher as they've done previously (Mt 9:11; 12:38), a title not used by disciples but by opponents or non-followers (8:19; 17:24, 19:16). If they truly respected Jesus as a

herself died.²⁸ In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.”

²⁹ Jesus answered them, “You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.³⁰ For in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven.

³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God,³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead but of the living.”³³ And when the crowds heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, **THEY GATHERED TOGETHER,**³⁵ and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him.³⁶ “*Teacher,* which commandment in the law is the greatest?”³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- These three encounters are presented as challenges to Jesus’ authority by the established religious authorities of the day. The first encounter asks the question about state authority versus the authority of God. The second addresses the power of tradition and the past, is God the God of our past/our people, or of the present/future and now? The final encounter seems to be about what is the most important thing for God...Jesus seems to say that it’s all important and all connected. Which of the three encounters most clearly speaks to you, or resonates with your own questions? Why?
- We’ve been talking about the word HOLY קֳדוֹשׁ /kodesh/, it meaning “to be set apart for a specific purpose.” God called the people to be holy - set apart for a particular reason). What is Jesus saying about what it means to be set apart for God?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

...teacher they wouldn’t be trying to trap or oppose him as is described in verse 15

taxes :: or “tribute” which had been imposed since in the Roman occupation of Israel in 63 BCE. They were a means of subjugation, of establishing authority and source of Rome’s wealth. If Jesus says not to pay taxes he’s an insurrectionist and might be arrested. If he says to pay them then he’s advocating accommodation with the imperialist oppressors of his people.

denarius:: The denarius was the standard Roman silver coin from 211 BCE to 244 CE. It was worth a day's pay for a skilled laborer. It contained an image of the portrait of the Emperor (pictured) which would go against the second of the 10 commandments “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.” (Exodus 20:4.)



Sadducees :: The Sadducees were elitists who wanted to maintain the priestly caste, but they were also liberal in their willingness to incorporate Hellenism (Greek – or *Gentile* - ways of living) into their lives, something the Pharisees opposed. The Sadducees rejected the idea of the Oral Law and insisted on a literal interpretation of the Written Law; consequently, they did not believe in an afterlife, since it is not mentioned in the Torah. The focus of Sadducee life was rituals associated with the Temple. The Sadducees disappeared around 70 A.D., after the destruction of the Second Temple. In the gospels they are presented as opponents of John the Baptizer, Jesus and the Pharisees.

THEY GATHERED TOGETHER, :: These two “parties” (Pharisees & Sadducees) served in the Great Sanhedrin, a kind of Jewish Supreme Court made up of 71 members whose responsibility was to interpret civil and religious laws. This is the group that judge Jesus and seek his execution (Matthew 26:57-67).