

**Sunday, October 22, 2017 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. 20<sup>th</sup>. Sunday after Pentecost. My kingdom is not of this world.**

**QUESTION: What was the trap the Pharisees were plotting?**

**“If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none.” - Author Ray Bradbury.**

Israel was occupied by **Rome** at the time of **Jesus**. The Roman empire had its own currency, and like most currency throughout the world even today, the coins had likenesses of the political leaders. In America we have past presidents, in Rome the likeness was of the emperor, **Caesar**.

Also, the Jews, primarily because of their religion, had their own currency. The Jewish faith and religious structure made no distinction between church and state. **The church was the state**. The High Priest was the supreme leader and the **Sanhedrin** was their governing body.

The situation was complicated by the Roman occupation. Jews were **not allowed** to use the Roman money for their **religious rituals** like the temple tax and payment for sacrificial animals. The reason being that the Emperor was considered by the Romans to be God, and using the money would be tantamount to worshipping the **Roman God**.

The Pharisees hoped that Jesus would say they should not pay the tax because doing so with Roman currency would be **blasphemy**, and yet **not** paying the tax would be breaking the Roman law under which they all lived.

The money changers that Jesus threw out of the temple were exchanging these coins with Caesar’s image for plain bronze coins, because buying animals for religious sacrifice using coins with Caesar’s image was forbidden by Jewish religious law.

They bring him a denarius, and on that coin, is an image of Caesar.

**With his answer** Jesus in effect **establishes** the **political** and **legal** separation of **church and state**. I don’t think that the American people understand how important that separation is. There is talk by our president that the law which

prohibits **non-profits** and **religious institutions** from promoting political candidates and parties should be **removed**.

What he is referring to is the IRS ruling regarding forbidding non-profits from engaging in partisan politics. This policy has withstood numerous challenges and has been upheld repeatedly by the US Congress.

According to several news sources some **81% of the Christian Fundamentalist white churches** voted for our president and spoke publicly about their support even saying that it is **God's Will** that he be elected. That is a perversion of **both religion and politics**. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "**My kingdom is not of this world!**"

Mixing church and state is a dangerous place to be. There are **multitudes** of examples throughout history of what happens when religion and politics are mixed together, or worse yet when **the church and the state are one**.

Many people have the mistaken idea that the **Soviet Union** was a **secular state** with no religion. That is not true. The state suppressed and controlled the **Russian Orthodox Church, the State Church** of the Russian Empire, and replace it with the religion of **atheism**.

When a couple was married the vows were spoken in front of a statue of **Stalin**, and after he fell from public grace, **Lenin**. The Russians didn't do away with religion they just replaced the symbols with new ones. The **church was the state**, and the **state was the church**. That's called **theocracy** and it is very dangerous.

In Hitler's Germany it was far more sinister. He kept the **Christian symbols** and names for his own propaganda purposes and for the oppression of and murder of Jews. He had some excellent source material in that the **Christian scriptures** themselves demonize the Jews as **Christ killers**, and our own **Martin Luther** was a vehement **anti-Semite**.

These are just facts of history that Hitler used for own political purposes. He rendered the church **useless** by demanding that they say nothing about his **Third Reich**. There is a book about this called **Hitler's Pope** in which Pope Leo XII meets with Hitler and both agree to stay out of each other's way. **No**, that's not what the Gospel calls us to do. The Gospel calls us to confront evil wherever it is found and to call it by its name.

What Hitler did not realize is that when there is true separation of church and state, **the Gospel transcends all forms of government.** God is a God of justice, and tyranny never outlasts freedom and good. People like **Diedrich Bonhoeffer**, Lutheran Pastor, spoke out against the murder of innocent people just because they were **Jews.**

**Eric Metaxes, American author and historian wrote:**

**"One sometimes hears that Hitler was a Christian. He was certainly not, but neither was he openly anti-Christian, as most of his top lieutenants were. What helped him aggrandize power, he approved of, and what prevented it, he did not. He was utterly pragmatic."**

And talk about the ultimate narcissism and perversion of both politics and religion this is what Reinhard Heydrich, architect of the Holocaust is recorded as saying:

***"You'll see the day, ten years from now, when Adolf Hitler will occupy precisely the same position in Germany that Jesus Christ has now."*** – Reinhard Heydrich,

In our own country following the **Emancipation Proclamation of 1860**, the institution of slavery ended only in name replaced by **Jim Crow Laws**, that lasted until **1965**. **Black people were lynched as late as 1921**, and the churches, **afraid of being political**, and themselves held captive by **racism** remained deathly silent.

The murder of innocent human beings is a **moral outrage**, and many of the **churches** of America have yet to come to terms with it even so late in the game.

When we as pastors speak on these things from the pulpit we are not **"being political,"** we are exercising and fulfilling our **responsibility**, solemnly promised at our ordination to **"teach, preach and administer the sacraments."**

If we who represent the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus do not speak out against moral issues like the destruction of our environment and the treatment of the poor, we are not fulfilling the oath of our office.

**If we do not speak out** against the double standard of behavior toward minorities, people of different sexual orientations or mental conditions, we are not fulfilling the oath of our office.

**If we do not speak out** against criminal behavior in the highest offices that we have entrusted our politicians to, and do not hold them to a **higher standard**, we are not fulfilling the oath of our office.

**If we do not speak out** about the **demeaning of women**, and **moral bankruptcy** of a system of economics that is based on greed and ever more **affluence** for **some**, and **poverty** for others, we are not fulfilling the oath of our office

The question the Pharisees put to Jesus had nothing to do with **taxes** or **Caesar**. It had to do with having a **moral compass** and basic human values that transcend both **religion** and **politics**.

**The message of Jesus makes it clear that God has made you beautiful, marvelous, full of potential and grace enough to change the world. Believe in yourself, love your neighbor, practice kindness, and reject anyone and anything that would hold you back or keep you down!**

In a verse from **Max Ehrmann's *Desiderata***,

***You are a child of the universe,  
no less than the trees and the stars;  
you have a right to be here.  
And whether or not it is clear to you,  
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.***

**AMEN.**

