

Introductory

This text has parallels in Mark (12:13-17) and Luke (20:19-26). None of those texts are appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. This text (15-21) is appointed in LW to be read on Pentecost 22 in Series A. The Mark and Luke texts are not read in the LW three-year lectionary, nor in the LSB three-year cycle. It appears that He is finished speaking to the question of authority.

The three parables from the last three weeks began with the religious leaders questioning His authority. Jesus responds by asking them a question that traps them in their words. Here, those same religious leaders gather together to talk about what to do about Jesus, and they decide to borrow a tactic that had worked for Jesus against them; they would trap Him in His words.

This may be the most clear expression of Two Kingdoms found in the words of Jesus. What better time to teach from the pulpit this very important teaching. Many Lutherans are familiar with the concept, but most are not, and some have a fuzzy understanding at best. Many will recognize the term as something they have heard used in the past, but really have no clue what it means.

That being the case, preach and teach about the Two Kingdoms as if you are preaching to beginners, because in many cases you will be. Talk about the characteristics of the two kingdoms and compare and contrast how they are the same and how they are different. After erecting a foundation, build on it, helping the current American Christian to better understand those things.

We live in a time and place where many Democrats say they don't know how a Christian can be a Republican, much less vote for Trump. Republicans, including Trump supporters, wonder how a Christian can be a Democrat. As a matter of fact, a lot of Republicans and Democrats manage to overcome that hurdle, and they sit side by side and maybe commune together on Sunday morning.

We do observe that the Democrat party seems more amenable to the liberal wing of our religion, while conservative Christians trend Republican. The obvious rationale for that is that conservative in religion tends to be conservative in politics and vice versa. The less obvious is that as liberal churches have abandoned orthodox theology, and they have politicized it leaning very left.

It's almost like, having abandoned orthodox doctrine, they have replaced it with a new doctrine – we might say a new "god" – to replace that which has been lost. The Natural Man will worship the divine, and if he doesn't know the True God, then he will make one up. In this case, they are retaining the trappings of Christianity – the vocabulary, the building, even some theology.

The origins of what has come to be known as “woke” did not start in the Kingdom of the Left. It finds its origins in theological liberalism in Europe and now in America. To be sure, The Culture has taken that ball and run with it. We observe that much of the opposition to orthodox Christianity comes from “Christians” who hear all manner of false doctrine from “Christian” pulpits.

The people in those pews think that they are being good Christians when they support things like "abortion rights" and "gay marriage," and of course giving things to people for free, that rings like something that is very Christian. I don't see that kind of religious fervor in Republicans, and I know leftists who call Trump "the devil," but have never heard rightists call him "messiah."

We are very familiar with political parties, and The Herodians were people who gave political support to the ruling Herodian family of Judea. Like the Pharisees, they desired independence from Rome. Unlike the Pharisees, who desired a theocratic Judah ruled by people like them, the Herodians only desired that the Herodian Dynasty rule in a Judah independent from Rome.

For now, under the Roman thumb, the political bent of the Herodians was to cooperate with Rome, to pay the Roman tribute, and in return Herod be allowed to rule with the title of King. These are somewhat strange bedfellows. The two groups are sent off together, with the stated intention of trapping Jesus in His words. Stay tuned. They will bring up the third rail of Judea-Roman politics.

They begin speaking to Jesus with a series of very flattering statements that meant nothing. None of these people mean anything that they say about Him. Remember their stated goal and purpose, and then recall the change in your posture towards a group of theologians or other people when they flatter you with kind words; thinking that you are among friends, you let your guard down.

15. Having heard the Parable of the Marriage Feast “Τότε πορευθέντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι συμβούλιον ἔλαβον – then the Pharisees went away and took counsel.” They had already seen His cleansing of the Temple, and likely seen or at least heard about Jesus cursing the fig tree. They challenged His authority (21 :23), and He responded with three parables of condemnation against them,

They were very aware that He was talking about them and what He’s saying. The word "counsel" is a noun, and the verb is "took," and the phrase "they took counsel" means they were meeting, in all likelihood as the Sanhedrin. The item on the agenda is stated as " ὅπως αὐτὸν παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ how they might trap Him in His words." They want to play "gotcha," and He's game.

Not all questions are the same. Sometimes, a question is just a question; the person asking doesn't know something, he asks somebody he thinks knows the answer, and he asks the question, looking for information. The verb "trap" is a hapax logomena – it occurs only once – in the NT, and it's a compound with the root "παγίς" – the cognate noun – which makes five appearances in the NT.

That noun occurs five times in the NT, once from Jesus as recorded by Luke (21:34), where He talks about those being caught with their pants down on the last day, and four times in Paul, once in Romans and three times in the Pastoral Epistles. In all of Paul's uses, the word is connected to the activity of Satan, and in his writings to Titus and Timothy, he explicitly says just that.

The meaning of their agenda item is clear, and you have probably had it happen to you; somebody trying to make you say something that will be – or appear to be – silly or stupid, or that they can twist into another meaning. These religious leaders did that a lot, and if you want to see how many times and the other places — bible hub lists these five: Mark 3:2, 12:13, Luke 11:53, 20:20, 26,

16. So, αἱ ἀποστέλλουσιν αὐτοῖς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτῶν μετὰ τῶν Ἡρῳδιανῶν – so they sent out their disciples with the Herodians.” We noted last week that the messengers were “sent,” using the same sending language as when the Apostles – the ones “sent” – were sent out. Here we see the Pharisees doing the same thing – they had “disciples” too, and they send them out to Jesus.

The somewhat mysterious Herodians make two appearances in the NT, both in the company of the Pharisees, and they are portrayed as being opposed to Jesus. They would have joined the Pharisees in opposition to Rome as well. The Sadducees, along with the Pharisees the two political powers in that time and place, would have been in favor or cooperating – collaborating – with Rome.

Sending those boys to do their man's work, “λέγοντας Διδάσκαλε, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς εἶ καὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ διδάσκεις – saying ‘teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the road of God in truth.’ Oh, really? Cambridge nails it, saying, “Nothing could exceed the insidious hypocrisy of this attack on Jesus. His enemies approach Him as a teacher whom they trust.”

Then they speak truth, “καὶ οὐ μέλει σοι περὶ οὐδενός, οὐ γὰρ βλέπεις εἰς πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων – you don't care about anyone, for you do not look at the appearance of men.” The verb “μέλει – to care” does not mean to care like a Christian should care. Jesus is not “anxious” or “concerned,” and He does not look at the surface, the superficial things of people, another true compliment.

Like most cultures of most times and most places, the outward appearance of a person meant everything. Good looking or not, the color of your skin, clothing, cleanliness, the way you talk, your class, and a hundred other things by which people judge other people all the time, and on that basis, they come to conclusions about what kind of a person this newly met individual is.

17. There's nothing more flattering than "εἰπὼν οὖν ἡμῖν, τί σοι δοκεῖ – tell us therefore 'what do you think?'" Who doesn't like to be asked what does he think? The "οὖν – therefore," is like saying "because you are (insert some flattering statements)" we want to pick your brain. We don't want to pick that guy's brain. We want to pick your brain. But Jesus does not lower His guard.

The question they ask is not open-ended, but closed; it's an either/or "ἐξεστὶν δοῦναι κῆνσον Καίσαρι ἢ οὐ – Is it permitted to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" The question is about what KJV calls the "Tribute Penny," a required tax that was required to be paid to the Roman occupiers by the occupied of Judah. It's the same tax – same word – that appeared earlier in Matthew (17:24ff.)

There, in Capernaum, expecting an affirmative answer, the tax collector asked Peter if his "teacher" pays the tax. Peter did answer in the affirmative, as expected. Peter then returns to Jesus, who asks Him the Machiavellian question about whether Kings tax their own people or others. Peter responds with the Machiavellian answer that Kings collect tax from others, not their own, no duh.

Jesus concludes "then the sons are free." To illustrate, He then tells Peter to go fish, and when you catch a fish, you will find a coin. Take that coin and give it to the tax man. Oh, and pay your own tax as well. By doing it that way, He minimizes the importance of paying taxes, almost making a joke of it. He also pays the tax not out of his own pocket, but out of creation, the fish's mouth.

If you study Roman tax law from that period, one of the things that strikes you is that Roman tax law is a rather complicated subject. If somebody is studying our current tax law two thousand years from now, they would come to the same conclusion about American tax law. One thing actual scholars seem to agree on is that the tax in play here was first levied by Quirinius, whom we know.

That being the case, this was a relatively new tax, and on that account controversial. Besides that, the tax was both draconian and intrusive. When the Holy Family went to Bethlehem, they were subjected to an intense and lengthy interrogation to determine the extent of their assets, their income, and they were taxed accordingly. Like the IRS, the Roman tax man always got his tax.

Most people don't like to pay taxes, and some people -- like me — loath them, and that applies in all times and all places. Some people simply don't pay taxes at all, and the Zealots would have been the political group advocating tax resistance. Simon was a Zealot, and he apparently remains silent in this discussion, but he had to be rooting for Jesus to say – but of course, He didn't.

I have translated the first word "permitted" rather than "lawful" because it makes the meaning clearer. Of course, it was legal – and more to the point it was required – for people to pay the tax. The question was whether or not a Jewish person could in good Jewish faith pay the tax. So, you see where they're going with this question, the one that's intended to trap Jesus in His words.

They ask Him for a yes or no answer, knowing that one party or the other is going to be put off. But Jesus is God, and He's smarter than them, and He knows that just because somebody asks a "yes" or "no" question, that doesn't mean that you have to answer yea or nay, and He doesn't. In fact, in a fine example of the hunter becoming the hunted, He sort of traps them in their own trap.

18. Being God, He sees this for what it is, and His answer, γνοὺς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πονηρίαν αὐτῶν εἶπεν Τί με πειράζετε, ὑποκριταί; – knowing their wickedness, He says 'why do you test me, you hypocrites?' This is consistent with Jesus; should He be asked a question by somebody who asks the question because he genuinely wants to learn from Jesus, He will gladly answer the question.

But if He is asked a question with other motives, He will often light up the questioner, like here. If somebody asks me a question because he desires to learn from me, then of course I will answer

the question. But if somebody is trying to trap me in my words, I am going to be more careful and skillful in answering. It's a skill that all people should develop, and its especially useful for pastors.

The base meaning for "πειράζω" is "to prove." In the NT the word is often translated – with negative connotations – "to tempt" or – with positive connotations – "to test." The people asking this question are doing it to test Him. They may well be asking it to tempt Him to say something by which saying He would find Himself regarded as treasonous or in rebellion against Rome.

Were that to be the case, the Jesus Problem would be dealt with by them, and Jesus would go away. As the movie Spartacus taught us so long ago, the Romans dealt very brutally with rebellion. As Josephus taught us even longer ago, if you are going to rebel against Rome, you had better succeed. But Jesus is much too savvy to be led into doing that, and He's about to turn the tables.

19. As is also consistent in Jesus, He does not bring an object with Him from home to use as an "object lesson." However, He often does use things that are already there to better teach these adults. Continuing to speak to people He has just labeled as "hypocrites," and still foregoing the "yes" or "no" answer requested by His questioners, He tells them to show Him the money.

He requests or commands "ἐπιδείξατέ μοι τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου. — show me the coin of the tribute," and they did. The coin was in all likelihood a denarius, a Roman coin with which we are quite familiar. It was the coin used to pay one laborer one day's wages. Because in the seventeenth century the penny was used to pay a laborer for a day, the KJV calls it the "Tribute Penny."

Likely as well the coin was the Tiberian Denarius, the one with the inscription "Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus" on one side and the seated, rather racy goddess Livy on the other side. Such a coin with that sort of graven image would have been seen as idolatry were it brought into the Temple, where such things were known to be the cause of riotous behavior.

But on the street and not in the Temple that coin was okay. All involved would have viewed coinage on the street in much the same way that we view it; a light, convenient thing with a fixed value, a way to buy and sell stuff. For now, Americans understand that concept, but coinage and paper money are fading away. These days, I can carry a sawbuck around for weeks without breaking it.

At His request, "οἱ δὲ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δηνάριον – they offered Him a denarius."

20. He says to them, "Τίνος ἡ εἰκὼν αὕτη καὶ ἡ ἐπιγραφή; – whose image and whose inscription?" It's an ellipsis – the words "on the coin" are absent. It's also a rhetorical question – the answer to which is obvious, like holding out a dime and asking that. Go ahead and talk about ellipsis and other figures of speech. People know about them. They just don't know what they're called.

21. They say to Him, "Καίσαρος – Caesar's." That was easy. He says to them, "τότε λέγει αὐτοῖς Ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ. – therefore, give the things of Caesar to Caesar and the things of God to God," and the Christian knows well that saying. Go ahead and talk about the Kingdom of the Left and the Kingdom of the Right, and maybe bring Simon into it.

The verb that governs His response, “ἀποδίδωμι – to give” is an aorist imperative; a command to give, with focus on the act. The answer is brilliant in its simplicity and brevity, and teachers take note. Sometimes less is more. The "yes" or "no" is answered with "both," and it's not complicated, and it would not have surprised us if He had included a "no duh" somewhere along the line.

One can, He says, pay the tax to the Romans, and in so doing be a loyal citizen, and doing so would not interfere with one's religious duties. At the same time, one can pay the Temple Tax for the maintenance of the building to Temple. People are familiar with the concept of paying taxes to the secular government and also giving offerings to the Church and other charitable entities.

In those days, their Sunday offerings took the form of alms, which was voluntary, but the Temple Tax, was compulsory. Politically, In most of our congregations, you will find Republicans and Democrats, and perhaps a smattering of Libertarian, Green, even perhaps a Socialist here and there. But as socialism develops in our country, we can see why preachers used to condemn it.

I keep my politics out of the pulpit and out of my classroom, and it's getting harder all the time. Our impulse is to say, "there are problems on both sides," and there are, but the left is much more problematic for Christianity than the right. You can find people nearly devoid of compassion on the right, and that's where the white supremacists are slotted, all 20,000 of them, mostly in Idaho.

Leftist groups like Antifa, BLM, and the like are on several points antithetical to and even opposed to the Christian religion. BLM scorns the nuclear family and espouses Marxism, which is Atheistic and has other problems vis a vis our religion. Antifa is a violent group that has targeted churches for damage and destruction, and whose leader has called for "white Jesus" to be taken out.

I probably don't have people like that in the pews at my church, but I'm sure some are in favor of varying degrees of socialism. The problem of Socialism for the Church is the state control of all things, including The Church. We don't have to wonder what that looks like. Beginning with the Act of Supremacy (1534), making the English Monarch the head of the Anglican church...

It was a disaster for England, which up to that time had been a very Christian nation, not only in name, but in word and deed as well. Among other things, Henry VIII confiscated all church property, and his dissolution of the monasteries — they didn't know how much they depended on those institutions until they were no longer there to feed, educate, provide medical care, et al.

People who were used to looking to the King and other nobility to provide for them have easily transitioned to looking to the elected government to take care of them in the secular realm. Pastors and other church officials know well who butters their bread, and European socialist governments have fully exploited that relationship to get their message out from the pulpits of their countries.

22. Upon hearing those words, "ἐθαύμασαν, καὶ ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ἀπῆλθαν – they marveled, and leaving Him they went away." The verb for "marvel" is the one reserved for the really amazing

things that Jesus does that leave people absolutely gob smacked. Usually it's a miracle, but here they are amazed by the way that He used words to answer and diffuse that hot-button issue.

And it's the people who asked the question, the ones who went there for the express purpose of trapping Him in His words, who marvel that He has verbally totally eviscerated them. Note the last two verbs. The second says that they left the scene, and the first says that they left Him. To paraphrase, "they couldn't get away from Him fast enough." Luke tells us they were silent. Again.