

Exodus 33: 12-23

Psalm 99

Pentecost 21 2023.

I Thessalonians 1: 1-10

St. Matthew 22: 15-22

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperors, and to God the things that are God’s.” Matthew 22: 21

Corrie ten Boom was born in Harleem, in the Netherlands, in 1892. Corrie’s father was a watchmaker, and Corrie learned the trade, as well as running classes for local teenage girls. In May 1940, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. In May 1942, Corrie and the rest of the ten Boom family began sheltering Jewish people, and members of the Dutch resistance. It is estimated that over 800 Jewish people were spared from the Nazis, by the ten Booms’ efforts. In 28 February 1944, a Nazi informant told the authorities what was happening. Corrie and the others were arrested, and were eventually taken to the notorious Ravensbruck concentration camp. Corrie was the only survivor in her family...

Corrie was condemned by the Nazis, not only because she sheltered Jewish people, but Corrie also cared for people with intellectual disabilities, whom she insisted were equally loved by God (contrary to the Nazis’ eugenics policy)...

After surviving the war, Corrie encountered and forgave 2 of the guards from the concentration camp, one of whom was particularly cruel to Corrie’s sister. Corrie became very well known as a Christian speaker and author, as well as caring for Dutch with intellectual disabilities, or who had collaborated with their enemies, the Nazi party. Corrie ten Boom died in 1983...

In the gospel passage I just proclaimed, some Pharisees try to entrap Jesus, by asking a question about paying taxes. We recall that Palestine was under occupation by the Roman army at this time – somewhat like the Nazis’ invasion of the Netherlands during World War II. Understandably, the Jewish people despised the conquering authorities, and longed for the coming Messiah, whom they understood would set the people free...

Some Pharisees try to entrap Jesus... The Pharisees think that if Jesus counsels loyalty to the Romans by paying taxes, he will be despised by his people... On the other hand, if Jesus says *not* to pay taxes, he can be charged with sedition.... The Lord Jesus’ reply is masterful: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperors, and to God the things that are God’s...” We are to be loyal to God, and to have appropriate observance to legitimate political authorities...

This means that Christians are to pay our taxes, to observe the laws of the land, and to participate in community life. We might not always agree with what our municipal, provincial or federal governments are doing, but we are to contribute wisely to the public good.

God isn't only at work in the Church. God is at work in the world. There is human sin and disobedience, but along with all that, the Holy Spirit is at work in God's creation, to establish God's kingdom values, and to call home a confused and disobedient humanity...

What do we do, if we are under a government whose behaviours are profoundly contrary to the gospel? For example, what if we are in the position of Corrie Ten Boom during World War II? Or – to take an example from the early Church – what do we do if we are Christians in an army, and we are being commanded to kill other people? After all, the sixth of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not murder...”

This is not to be taken lightly. However, after extensive prayer and discernment, if we judge that a government edit or law is of such profound depth, and consequence, that we are being disobedient to God by following it – then our first loyalty needs to be to God. After all, it is *to God* that we will all have to give an account for our conduct, and for our faithfulness.

The early Christians realized that this potentially means martyrdom – that is, that we will be murdered because of our faith... In Canada, that is quite unlikely to happen: The extent of our persecution will probably be some teasing. Yet, the principle remains the same – our primary allegiance is to God, to whom we have committed our faith.

By the grace of God, may we be good citizens. Even more, may we be faithful disciples, now and for ever.

Amen.