

*Please note that this is a written version rather than a transcript.*

## Call to Worship

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts.  
Worship the Lord in holy splendour;  
tremble before him, all the earth.  
Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!'

*Psalm 96 .8-10a*

Welcome to my reflection for The Cotteridge Church on Sunday 18th October 2020. I was out on the bike this week and decided to record the opening part of the video version of this reflection 'old school' with the camera hand held. I was cycling along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal, from Kings Norton towards Bournville and stopped near Lifford Lane bridge. There's a vividly graffitied wall there and, behind that wall was once located Kings Norton Metal Company. There's a link with today's Gospel reading, but more about that later.

Today's reading is another encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders. They try and trap Jesus with a question about whether they should pay taxes to Caesar. A coin features in that discussion, and a coin also features when I talk about that site next to the canal and Lifford Lane Bridge.

But first the opening prayer. Let us pray:

## Opening Prayer

God, we are citizens of the land in which we live,  
but we are also citizens of your Kingdom.  
When there is conflict between our loyalty to each;  
give us grace to uphold the values of your kingdom,  
strength to face persecution,  
courage to speak out for justice and righteousness,  
a voice to speak for the voiceless,  
and to proclaim that only your Kingdom is eternal.  
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,  
our Lord and King.

**Amen.**

*Mike Claridge*

I know that it's hard to believe, but I was at primary school when decimalisation came. That was 1971 but of course some of the new coins came out earlier, with the 5 New Pence and 10 New Pence coins being issued in 1968. I remember that there was great excitement on the playground when someone had the first 10 New Pence coin - the one with the lion and the crown on it. The new coins were the same size and value as the old shilling and two shilling coins which both remained in circulation alongside the new ones. The 2 shilling coin was also known as a Florin. Did you know though that the 2 shilling coin was introduced in Queen Victoria's reign as the first attempt at decimalisation?

Some of the early coins bear the words “One Tenth of a Pound”, there being 20 shillings to the pound before decimalisation.

One of the things that’s surprising, when you look back at it now, is the size of those pre-decimalisation coins. Most of them were made at the Royal Mint in London. Back before a date in the 1920s silver coins really were silver, the coins being made from sterling silver. Precious metals were being used at the Royal Mint. But the penny, the halfpenny and the farthing were made from base metal - copper. Some of those were made elsewhere, many of them were made in Birmingham by a company called Heaton’s at Hockley in the Jewellery Quarter. If you turn the coin over and look where the date is you might see a small H. that’s stands for Heaton’s, its’a Birmingham made coin. But in 1918 and 1919 some of them were made in Kings Norton. Alongside the date you’ll find a tiny KN for Kings Norton. Kings Norton Metal Company had made coins for many years for elsewhere in the world and had also made blanks for the Royal Mint to strike into coins. But in 1918 and 1919 coins were struck right here in Kings Norton.

The site where the Kings Norton Metal Company was is still industrial today but there’s nothing to see of the old factory. It’ now Melchett Road, part of Kings Norton Business Park. But there, for two short years, part of the coinage of the realm was produced. Which brings us to today’s Gospel reading:

### **Matthew 22 .15-22 - The question of paying tax to Caesar**

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.

The Gospel readings at the moment reflect the escalation in tensions between Jesus and the religious authorities. But the religious authorities now want to get the occupying foreign power onside - the Romans - and to do so have recruited the supporters of Herod - King of Judea by name, but a puppet king of the Roman regime. Only Rome had execution on the statute book and, if Jesus was to be out of the way once and for all, Rome would be needed to condemn him.

They try to trap him, and the Greek word used here is a hunting term meaning to entangle or to snare. They ask him a question; “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?”. Simple enough question, but a tricky one to answer.

If Jesus were to say - “Yes of course, you must the tax” then his opponents could say “He’s collaborating with the occupying Romans” and turn his supporters against him.

If Jesus were to say - "No way, don't pay that" he'll put himself on the side of the zealots who resist the Romans with force.

Jesus is on a sticky wicket, but he plays a straight bat in answering.

Seemingly, like the Queen today, Jesus and his disciples don't seem to carry cash and he has to ask his inquisitors for a coin. They produce a denarius, equivalent to a labourer's daily wage and hand it to him. He looks at it and asks "Whose head and title is this?". The answer is obvious - it's the emperor's. Then give it to the emperor he replies.

## **Confounded** - a poem by Marjorie Dobson

All he needed was a coin  
to confound their connivance.

Pharisees would not show their faces,  
so sent their disciples to distract him  
and the Herodians to harass him.

But malice and menace was their motive  
and entrapment was their end game  
for he was considered as an enemy.

Their disciples invoked his integrity  
and made their far from innocent enquiry,  
"Is Caesar within his right to seize our taxes?"

The Herodians held their breath.  
Would he condemn himself to the court of Herod?

But he caught the coin and called, "Heads?  
You lose! The head and coin are Caesar's.  
Give God what God has first given us."

And they gazed, amazed, at Jesus' way  
of double dealing with them  
and left lamely licking their wounds  
to report their rout.

*Marjorie Dobson*

Having dodged the trap that the Pharisees and Herodians have set Jesus takes the opportunity to remind them that, as well as giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, they must give to God what belongs to God. We're back in the vineyard again, where the tenants failed to produce the harvest. The same word Greek word is used meaning to render or to give. The paying tax to Caesar, and what we owe God, are not gifts to them, but are our due. as citizens of an earthly kingdom but also the Kingdom of God.

We're called to yield to God the harvest of lives of love, righteousness, justice and peace. But if those conflict with the demands of the state, of our earthly rulers, then our call is to follow God.

## **It's heads I win and tails you lose** - a hymn by Andrew Pratt

It's heads I win and tails you lose:  
terms calculated to abuse,  
such tangled words to trip Christ up,  
a poisoned chalice, bitter cup.

But Jesus saw right through their plan,  
a subtle, thoughtful, cunning man;  
he played with language, used his skill,  
soon turned the tables to his will.

'Whose head is [it] on this coin here?'  
his question sowed a seed of fear.  
A trap had opened deep and wide  
where intellect could slip and slide.

Whatever answer they might give  
would demonstrate how each would live.  
A time of crisis, time of choice:  
how should they answer to his voice?

And what of us? If we invest  
in worldly things, what of the rest?  
Can God lay claim to time and space?  
What do we owe for love and grace?

All that we have, all that we are,  
our lives, each joy, each tear, each scar,  
all these we owe to God, our debt;  
our choice to give or to regret.

Andrew Pratt 13/9/2011

## **Closing remarks**

Thank you for joining me for this reflection today. As always there's a written version on the resource site. Next week Jesus is quizzed about the Commandments and as to which of those is the most important.

Take care, stay safe, and the best of all God is with us!