

Greetings members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This week's Worship Resource is attached. This service revolves around Jesus' answer to the question of paying taxes in the Gospel of Matthew. His answer allows for a deeper reflection concerning our dedication and devotion as Christians. Our prayers for this Sunday focus on freedom in a number of ways; freedom from certain things, and freedom to accomplish the ministry we are called to.

The Sunday morning video for this week may be found on our webpage, shelburnechurch.org, and through the link below.

Our next, and final, Parking Lot Service for the year will be on Sunday November 1, 10:30 AM. This is All Saints Day and Communion. Please make your reservation by contacting Diantha at 413-625-6592 or by email foxtowne@gmail.com. Since this service will include Communion, we are asking those who participate to bring grape juice, or another appropriate beverage, and bread with them.

A note from Diantha concerning Carl Finn. "Carl, who joined the church with his wife Sue, in 2005, died last Friday at home. Carl and Sue were faithful attendees of our church, and she participated in Bible studies. It was after her death that Carl told me he had joined our church because that's where Sue wanted to join. But he had always been affiliated with St. Joseph's Church in Shelburne Falls. His brother and sister-in-law attended there, and that's where he chose to go but he made sure to let me know that he loved our church family. We would see him occasionally at the Trinity Church Community Meal when St. Joseph's provided the food. I think the last time was just before everything was shut down." A calling hour for Carl will take place from 11 AM- 12 noon on Saturday October 17 at St. Joseph Church in Shelburne Falls, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial. Burial will be private and held at the convenience of the family.

Please include our Pastoral Search Committee in your prayers this week as they continue to move through their ministry of discerning who God is calling as your next pastor.

Faithfully Yours,
Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship
October 18, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This week's Worship Resource reflects upon Jesus' reply to the question of paying taxes. The answer he gives opens the door to other considerations than simply the paying of one's taxes.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving, and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

And now let us be in worship

Morning Unison Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

As we gather here in the harbor of your safety, we thank you for fellowship and family. We ask that you strengthen us, restore us, and inspire us with your love. Fill us with your peace so that as we journey onward, we would pour out your love and grace to others.

This prayer we offer in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, saying...*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Prayers of the People

Today's prayers are about finding the freedom offered in our faith. Freedom from our confusion, our sorrow, or wayward nature and freedom to hear and understand God's call with clarity in a world of distraction. There will be time for your own prayers and for quiet meditation. Let us come to God in prayer.

Gracious God, who sets forth creation in your own order, who fills it according to your design, and who places us, in the midst of it all, we come to you in prayer, seeking to speak what we need to say, and hoping to hear something of your voice. We wish to sense a nudge along our journey that causes us to glance in a different direction or sets our feet more firmly along the path we are walking. We desire liberation from all that imprisons us. Free us, O God, from the sins of our natures. We confess that we are not sure why you have created us in your own image and endowed us with the ability to love and the ability to hate. We would be free of this nature you have blessed and cursed us with. We would rather be an example of how Christ can lift us up, of how we, above all else, are able to care for our neighbors, feed them, clothe them, comfort and cheer them. We would rather reflect your love, your tender mercies, your forgiveness, and your healing, so that all who meet us experience nothing except your hospitality and your welcoming arms. Free us, O God, from the sins of our nature, and liberate us to be free in your creation.

Free us, O God, from the shackles of our grief and our sorrow, for we are often brought low by the losses we endure, loss of loved ones, loss of youth, loss of livelihood, loss of ability. At times, Lord of the living, it feels like all life is loss and we find ourselves wrapped in its chains, unable to raise up our heads, our hearts, our souls, to the light of the life you have granted us. Through the comfort of your Holy Spirit, may we, who are so burdened, let our fetters fall. Free us, O God, from all that distracts us from you, so that we may hear your voice more clearly, and in so doing, recognize your call. In our world there is so much noise, so many voices beckoning to us, leading us down paths far from your will and your way. Chewing up our time, making us promises, and leaving us used up and empty.

Grant us clarity of vision, to see what is of you and what is not, grant us clarity of sound, to hear your voice above all others, and grant us clarity of purpose, to know what you would have us do with the blessings we have received. Free us, O God, from all that distracts us from you, and liberate us to be free in your creation. Free us, O God, to come before you, to lift up our thoughts, our concerns, our joys and our tears, let these our prayers be liberated from our hearts to rise up to you as incense.....

Gracious God, who sets forth your creation in your own order, who fills it according to your design, and who places us in the midst of it all, we offer our thanks. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 22:15-22

You Get What You Pay For

Our Gospel Lesson for today is the conclusion to Jesus' teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. Having responded to the chief priests and the elders question concerning his authority with a set of parables, Jesus is now confronted with an inquiry that is designed to entrap him. It would appear that the leadership of the temple has finally placed Jesus between a rock and a hard place.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Jesus said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax. Whose head is this, and whose title?" "The Emperor's." They replied "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage and share your thoughts.
There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.

Benediction:

Go forth and serve your God with patience and passion,
Be deliberate in living your faith.
Be steadfast in celebrating the power of the Holy Spirit.
And may peace be your way in the world. Amen.

Notes on the text

You get what you pay for is an idiom that we usually understand to mean if you do not fork over a lot of cash for something, it is probably of poor quality. If you pay a significant amount for something, it is more likely to be of good quality. Hence, buying a used Yugo with 175,000 miles on it for \$35.00 would be an example of the former and leasing a brand new Toyota Prius for \$180.00 a month would be an example of latter. This morning's Gospel narrative is another example of this idiom. When Jesus was in the temple teaching, those in power decided to find out what this upstart prophet would do if they placed him between a rock and hard place. So, they sent their disciples to set the trap. Notice they didn't have the brass to go themselves. The trap was this: Rome occupied Judea and all of Palestine, they weren't exactly well liked. All

Roman coinage had the emperor's face on it considered idolatrous in the eyes of the Jews and an annoying reminder of their oppressors. Rome did allow the Jews to mint their own coinage for their own use but insisted that taxes paid to Rome be paid in cold hard Roman cash complete with the emperor's portrait. So, the question is asked: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not? If Jesus answers, "pay the taxes," he would be seen as siding with Rome. Not a good thing if you're a Jew. If Jesus says, "don't pay the taxes," then he sets himself up against Rome. And if you think our IRS is not kind to tax evaders, the Roman IRS came complete with soldiers, long prison terms, whips, chains, and crosses. Either answer Jesus gives should lead to his ruin. And that's the trap. And so, Jesus, son of God, now perches on the horns of a dilemma. His answer? Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's. In either case, I would suggest, you get what you pay for. Consider the paying of one's taxes. Without starting a long, protracted argument concerning the use of our tax money by the state and the federal governments, let's move beyond the infuriating details of funding for things we don't believe in, to things that we do, like education, roads and bridges, an effective and efficient, military, How about accessible quality health care? Rendering unto Caesar is not portrayed as a bad thing in the gospel. It is an obligation that provides funding. At its best, providing funding for the good of the community. In 2005 a proposition 2 ½ override vote was taken in the town of Hamden. The override failed. Due to the lack of funding the town library and senior center were forced to close. The library and senior center were reopened in the summer of 2006 when funding was restored. You get what you pay for. This is not to say that every penny that you render unto Caesar should not be accounted for, but the idea that if we don't render unto Caesar, everything we have come to expect from local, state and federal programs will be given for free, and the idea that building a 10 million dollar bridge, can be done safely for half that amount is an impossible and irresponsible conclusion. You get what you pay for. Jesus says render to Caesar what is Caesar's and render to God what is God's. Is that yes? Or is it no? His answer is acceptable to the Romans. He said yes, give the coins to Caesar. The tribute goes to build roads and bridges, provide fresh water and other amenities for the community. Granted money that got funneled into the Roman empire also paid for the palaces, the games in the coliseum, and for the prisons, the whips, chains, and the crosses. His answer is also acceptable to the Jews. He said give to God what is God's, and we all know that everything belongs to God. So, if all things are God's, then what does that say about our living and our spending habits? If all things are God's, then what does that say about how we engage the political and social systems of our day? If all things are God's, then what does that say about those who are considered to be marginal, unimportant, unessential? Is this someone else's problem? Is it Caesar's problem? God's problem? Our problem? I think we get what we pay for. And it is more than simply paying your income tax and celebrating that at least some of the funds goes to the Smithsonian, public education and upgrading buildings so everyone can access them. It's more than sending in your church pledge with a 10% increase and celebrating that the ministry in this place will continue. I suggest that we are to interpret this directive on the fly, age by age, generation by generation, situation by situation. God's ways are not our ways and living with God is to live in tension. To say you get what you pay for, is to imply it is better to put up the extra cash for the good of the community. That it is better to provide the extra effort for the good of all God's people. But this is bigger than finances. You may remember back in the late 1970's the lite beer commercials with Bubba Smith. Taste great...less filling. Those

commercials sold kegs of beer. At the height of the popularity of that ad campaign, Bubba Smith walked away from it. When asked why, Bubba tells this story: "I went back to Michigan State for the homecoming parade last year. I was the Grand Marshal, and I was in the backseat of this car. The people were yelling, but they weren't saying, "go state go!" One side of the street was yelling, "tastes great!" While the other side of the street was yelling, "less filling!" Then we get into the stadium. The older folks were yelling, "kill, Bubba, kill!" But the students were yelling, "tastes great, less filling." Everyone in the stands was drunk. Suddenly I realized I was contributing to the alcohol problem, and I don't even drink. It made me realize I was doing something I didn't want to do. I was with my brother, who is my agent. I told him, "today, I'll never do another lite beer commercial." I loved doing the commercials, but I didn't like the effect it was having on a lot of people. Kids would come up to me on the street and recite lines from my commercials, verbatim. They knew the lines better than I did. Kids start to listen to things you say. You want to tell'em something that is the truth. Doing those commercials, it's like me telling everybody in school, "hey it's cool to drink. And get drunk." I used to go to Daytona Beach and Fort Lauderdale on spring breaks as a spokesman for the brewery. It was fun talking to the fans, until you see kids, lying on the beach because they can't make it back to their rooms." As the years wear on, you stop compromising your principles." While Bubba Smith doesn't exactly bring God into his explanation of why he decided to leave the lite beer commercial business, he is clear about where his loyalties are, the health, safety, and welfare of our nation's children. Children who he did not know but deserved to be told the truth. Rendering to God may, like Bubba, cause us to reevaluate what we do, what and who we support, and how we use the God given assets at our disposal, financial and otherwise. Rendering to God may involve your entire life. It may involve changing your entire life. In God's economy, you get what you pay for.