Daniel Garner Tate Sermon, Sunday, October 18, 2026
St Ambrose Episcopal Church, Foster City, CA
Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13), 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

In the name of the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Who Do We Belong To?

Jesus says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperors, and to God the things that are God’s.

What belongs to God? We do. Human beings belong to God.
"It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people" (Psalm 100:3). "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Our worship belongs to God. Our Psalm today says: "Give to the LORD glory and strength. Give to the LORD the glory due his name" (Psalm 96:7–8).

Our allegiance belongs to God. "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).

Our love belongs to God. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

Everything belongs to God. "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

In Romans Paul says that we are God's even in death. "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

So why do we have to give ourselves to God, if we already belong to God? Because belonging is not the same as relationship. We don't have to give ourselves to God. We have a choice.

I wonder if God wants us to give back, because God doesn't want to be alone, or for us to be alone. It's like a father and his son. The son already belongs to the family. He doesn't have to do anything to become his father's son. But the father wants a loving relationship with him. He wants his son to respond to his love freely. The father cannot force his son to love him.

Every year about this time, new chaplain students arrive at the hospital, and some of us have the privilege of mentoring them. First, they shadow us on visits to see patients, and then after we've done that together for a while, then we shadow them. It's always much more rewarding to visit patients together. I wish I could visit patients together as a team more often.

I recently came across the great Argentinian classical concert pianist Martha Argerich. She is considered to be one of the greatest living pianists and one of the greatest of all time. She has often shared in interviews of feeling "lonely" on stage during solo performances. So, since the 1980s, she has staged very few solo performances, concentrating on concertos, and collaborating with other performers. She also promotes younger pianists through her annual festivals.

I think this is what Jesus is getting at. This is the way God is. God invites us to respond, to give back the gifts and the love we have already received. God wants a relationship.

We respond through love, gratitude, faithfulness, compassion, and the way we treat others. When we use our gifts to serve others. A teacher teaching, a nurse at bedside, parents nurturing their children, when comfort the dying and the grieving. These can all be expressions of giving ourselves to God (1 Peter 4:10).

Belonging to God is a gift. Giving ourselves to God is our response. Living in God's love is how our relationships grow with God and each other. We give to God when we forgive, when we give up resentment and choose not to let past injuries govern our lives. When we reconcile, admit our mistakes, apologize, heal broken relationships. We give ourselves to God when we choose what's right instead of doing what others expect, when we refuse to compromise our conscience (Acts 5:29). We give ourselves to God when we stop allowing other people's opinions to determine our worth, who we are. We give ourselves to God when we accept our limitations and learn to trust, instead of trying to control everything. We give ourselves to God when we love without possessing, manipulating, or controlling other people, when we respect their freedom. We give ourselves to God when we face death with honesty, accept our mortality and seek to live mindfully with the time we have, even when we're afraid.

I visited a patriarch who was dying, and his large family had to decide if they were going to take heroic measures to keep him alive. They explored all avenues with the medical team, but it became clear that there was nothing left to do. Sometimes families fight with each other when deciding, but this family didn't. It was terrible, but when the time was right, and everyone had said their goodbyes, they let him go. They gave back to God the loving father they'd been given.

So, what do we owe the emperor? Jesus does say render unto Caesar what is Caesars. The emperor might say that we owe him exactly what we owe God. He might even say we belong to him. Some of those emperors called themselves gods. The coin that Jesus was talking about was a denarius, a Roman silver coin used to pay taxes. And it likely had the image of Emperor Tiberius, who ruled during Jesus' ministry. And it would have had the words “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” Augustus, the former emperor had been declared a god after his death. The coin associated the emperor with divine status and religious authority.

What is Caesar a metaphor for today? Caesars want our loyalty, our obedience, our admiration,

and our worship. Caesar is not always a government or a ruler. Caesar can be our employer, our own personal ambitions, our possessions, our fears, or our need for approval. If I say yes to my boss because I feel like I can't say no, because he might not think I'm a team player, then I am a slave. If I have a manager who expects me to answer texts when I'm on my own time, and I obey, then I am living under Caesar. If I feel like I have to work every day and never rest, then I am a slave. God says remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. If I am addicted to social media, I am obeying Caesar. If I don't love God, and don't love my neighbor or myself, I am obeying Caesar. Caesar wants us to never disagree and to be silent. Our current government, among other things, has been trying to silence the press. This is Casaer like behavior.

Caesar tells us that if we conform, we will belong. If we are a success, then we matter. If we obey, we will be accepted. But there is a price for that acceptance. When surrender our freedom, our conscience, and our identity, we begin living someone else's life.

Jesus reminds us that we were created for something greater. We bear God's image. In Genesis God says, "Let Us make human beings in Our image, after Our likeness... male and female" (Genesis 1:26-27). Belonging to God does not mean becoming less than ourselves. It means becoming what God created us to be. Caesar wants us to exist for his sake. God calls us into a relationship where we and our neighbors can grow.

Jesus doesn't say, give Caesar everything he asks for. And He doesn't say give Caesar nothing. When he says give to Caesar what is Caesar's, he's saying that Caesar has a place. Jesus is telling us to fulfill our responsibilities to the world, but never allow the world to become our God. Government, work, money, and institutions, all have their place. The problem begins when they take first place. Jesus asks whose image is on the coin. The answer is Caesar's. But whose image is on us? God's. Give Caesar your taxes, but not your soul. Give your employer your work, but not your identity. Give others your respect, but not control over your worth. Give the world your participation, but not your worship. Because we already belong to God.

What are we allowing to possess us that keeps us from being free? What are we giving to Caesar that is costing us our freedom, our love, or our sense of who we are?

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to October 19

Year A
Proper 24
RCL

Track 1	*or*	***Track 2***
Exodus 33:12-23		Isaiah 45:1-7
Psalm 99		Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13)
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10		1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22		Matthew 22:15-22

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth."

The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." And the LORD continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I

will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

The Psalm

Psalm 99

Dominus regnavit

1 The LORD is King;
let the people tremble; *
he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.

2 The LORD is great in Zion; *
he is high above all peoples.

3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; *
he is the Holy One.

4 "O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob."

5 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and fall down before his footstool; *
he is the Holy One.

6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, *
they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.

8 O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

or

Old Testament

Isaiah 45:1-7

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him--
and the gates shall not be closed:
I will go before you and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

The Psalm

Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13)

Cantate Domino

1 Sing to the LORD a new song; *
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
2 Sing to the LORD and bless his Name; *
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations *
and his wonders among all peoples.

4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; *
he is more to be feared than all gods.

5 As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; *
but it is the LORD who made the heavens.

6 Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! *
Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!

7 Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples; *
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.

8 Ascribe to the LORD the honor due his Name; *
bring offerings and come into his courts.

9 Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; *
let the whole earth tremble before him.

10 [Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is King! *
he has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."

11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; *
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

12 Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy
before the LORD when he comes, *
when he comes to judge the earth.

13 He will judge the world with righteousness *
and the peoples with his truth.]

The Epistle

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word

only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

The Gospel

Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus 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?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” 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.” When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

From The Lectionary Page: http://lectionarypage.net