

Trinity 19

22nd October 2017

Proper 24 **Green**



Collect

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Isaiah 45:1-7 English Standard Version (ESV)

Cyrus, God's Instrument

45¹ Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: ²“I will go before you and level the exalted places,^[a] I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. ⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Footnotes: a. Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint *level the mountains*.

COMMENT: It is very difficult for us to see how the sovereignty of God in the day to day, year to year events of our time. But from God’s point of view time is not measured as we do it. History can only be regarded as providential when a higher purpose can be discerned in events that occur, often over long periods of time. That requires a

profound faith, a faith like that of the prophet of Israel's exile in Babylon which had lasted for two generations (586-539 BC). Scholars believe that this cataclysmic event of the Persian conquest of Babylon lay behind the story of the Babylonian king Belshazzar seeing handwriting on the wall which Daniel interpreted (Daniel 5:1-31). The Book of Daniel gives equates Cyrus as Darius as the conqueror of Babylon. The significance of this prophetic declaration that Cyrus was "the LORD's anointed" who would subdue nations and open doors for the LORD, presents this theological interpretation of history as clearly as any Old Testament passage. It was for Israel's sake that Cyrus had been called to a mission of conquest. The LORD's purpose of carrying Israel's sacred covenant forward was to be fulfilled by what historians regard as the remarkably tolerant policies of Cyrus toward the many peoples he conquered. Even though a non-believer in the eyes of the Israelites, Cyrus could still serve the divine purpose.

Matthew 22:15-22 English Standard Version (ESV)

Paying Taxes to Caesar

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances."^[a] ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?" ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.^[b] ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."²² When they heard it, they marvelled. And they left him and went away.

Footnotes: a. Greek *for you do not look at people's faces*. b. A *denarius* was a day's wage for a labourer.

COMMENT: Jesus' opponents attempt to entrap him with a very clever question about paying taxes. If a yes or no answer was given – he would have been caught – yes meant he favoured the Romans, and then be in bad odour with the people, and no – would have led him to be reported to the Romans in advocating disobedience. Even to keep

silent would have opened him to criticism, that he secretly was advocating one position or another. Jesus could have answered by way of throwing the question back – “I will answer you if you tell me what I should do”. For example, in challenging him on what authority he preached, Jesus replied with a question about John the Baptist (Matthew 21:23-27). This time, Jesus gives a direct response and in so doing, he does not separate material things from the spiritual, as some might presume but Jesus went beyond the question with a challenge to serve God with the whole of life. This was no more than the teaching of the Law – “*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*” (Deuteronomy 10:12). He believed that God is sovereign over all aspects of human life. In his answer is a clear definition of Christian stewardship: God has first call on us and all our assets.

Psalm 96 *Cantate Domino*

℟ Give the Lord glory and power.

¹ O sing a new song to the Lord,
sing to the Lord all the earth.

² O sing to the Lord, bless his name. ℟

Proclaim his help day by day,

³ tell among the nations his glory
and his wonders among all the peoples. ℟

⁴ The Lord is great and worthy of praise,
to be feared above all gods;

⁵ the gods of the heathens are naught. ℟

It was the Lord who made the heavens,

⁶ his are majesty and state and power
and splendour in his holy place. ℟

⁷ Give the Lord, you families of peoples,
give the Lord glory and power;

⁸ give the Lord the glory of his name. ℟

Bring an offering and enter his courts,
⁹ worship the Lord in his temple.
O earth, tremble before him.

✠ Give the Lord glory and power.

¹⁰ Proclaim to the nations: “God is king.”
The world he made firm in its place;
he will judge the peoples in fairness. ✠

¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad,
let the sea and all within it thunder praise,
¹² let the land and all it bears rejoice,
all the trees of the wood shout for joy. ✠

¹³ at the presence of the Lord for he comes,
he comes to rule the earth.
With justice he will rule the world,
he will judge the peoples with his truth. ✠

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: Recalling some of Israel’s greatest spiritual leaders, the psalmist calls the people to praise God for the many ways in which God has blessed them. It is one of several psalms thought to have been used to enthrone God as Israel’s sovereign at the beginning of a new year.

Post Communion

Holy and blessed God, you have fed us with the body and blood of your Son and filled us with your Holy Spirit: may we honour you, not only with our lips but in lives dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**