

Series: Words & Deeds Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”
“Render Unto God What Is God’s”
Isaiah 45:1-7
Psalm 96:1-9
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22

Render unto God what is God’s. Yes, let’s get deliberate with the Life Wallet each one of has been given to partner with God in being the good news to one another and others. Jesus loves you just the way you are and gives you courage to be authentic and join others in becoming the people and community God intends. As one of our members most recently told me, “As a football team and a basketball team always do better when working as a team, so must we as a church, work together to develop unity in our congregation and society.”

Citizenship in our country is important. With citizenship comes certain rights and privileges. In his 2010 memoir, *A Journey: My Political Life*, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair shares the following story:

A friend of mine whose parents were immigrants, Jews from Europe who came to America in search of safety, told me this story. His parents lived and worked in New York. They were not well off. His father died when he was young. His mother lived on, and in time my friend succeeded and became wealthy. He often used to offer his mother the chance to travel outside America. She never did. When eventually she died, they went back to recover the safety box where she kept her jewelry. They found there another box. There was no key. So they had to drill it open. They wondered what precious jewel must be in it. They lifted the lid. There was wrapping and more wrapping and finally an envelope. Intrigued, they opened it. In the envelope were her U.S. citizenship papers. Nothing more. That was the jewel, more precious to her than any other possession. That was what she treasured most.¹

¹Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (New York City, New York: Knopf, 2010), xvi.

Tony Blair's friend's mother was deliberate in getting and living her US citizenship. It inspired her. United States of America citizenship kept her going in her life to become all that it provided.

The public square dialogue surrounding racial equity, gender identity, education, climate change, health care, gender equality, and immigration requires an ability to listen well and engage with empathy. The dialogue is connected to citizenship, equal protection under the law, and the Bill of Rights. The public square dialogue does consume emotional, intellectual, physical, and financial resources. But real, authentic relationships care more about the dialogue partner than the issue.

This is where the good news of Jesus Christ, in word and deed, comes into play. Remember, God intends us to partner with God and connect with one another in the mission of bringing about the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. Hope is the expectation and desire that the will of God come about on earth as it is in heaven. Hope believes that all matter of things can be different. When we experience redemption, we are grateful for realized hope. Hope realized cultivates keen intuition and trusting faith. In this regard, Brene Brown writes,

Intuition is not independent of any reasoning process. In fact, psychologists believe that intuition is a rapid-fire, unconscious associating process, like a mental puzzle. The brain makes an observation, scans its files, and matches the observation with existing memories, knowledge and experiences... Faith and reason are not natural enemies... our need for certainty and to be right have pitted faith and reason against each other... Faith is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty. ²

Imagine being a congregation filled with people centered in cultivated intuition and

²Adapted from Brene Brown, *The Gifts Of Imperfection* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazeldon Publishing, 2010), 87, 88, 90.

trusting faith.

Isaiah 45:1-7 and Matthew 22:15-22 set forth this question. How is God involved in people's lives who are good and bad, religious and non-religious, and politically savvy or not so much?

God chose Abraham, Moses, Cyrus, Paul, and Caesar. God chooses people to accomplish things, pagan and non-pagan alike. God is Lord of life and works out God's will for God's good pleasure and the benefit of the common good. It is within that setting that Christians must hold tightly to the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor. Period. Bringing about the will of God on earth as it is in heaven is not dependent on a person's faith or lack thereof, high skill set or lack thereof, or stating the correct litmus tests of what moral and ethical behavior looks like. As one biblical scholar notes, "God's love will be the final verdict in this world and grounds our hope and our ethic in this reality."³ God chooses you.

Living out the good news of Jesus, the gospel, a person cannot avoid making justice centered decisions. The question asked Jesus about Caesar's coin thrusts us into questions about obedience, loyalty, and authority. These questions demonstrate how faith has an inescapable commitment to justice. Jesus is the ultimate plumb line. Because of Jesus' earthly obedience, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, Jesus is the standard for the world, but also God's hope for the world.⁴

³Brian D. Russell in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 394.

⁴In the two paragraphs above of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Miguel A. De La Torre, Brian D. Russell, Leigh Campbell-Taylor, Troy Miller, Carol J. Dempsey, OP, Michael E. Lee, and Theodore J. Wardlaw in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A*,

Listen carefully to these “Points for Success” for you to be generous with your Life Wallet through your time, talent, and treasure. I’d like you to ponder each point and its associated Bible verses. Do pick up a copy of this sermon manuscript on the way out of worship this morning at the Welcome Booth.

2024 Generosity Campaign Points for Success⁵

- i. Psalm 46: 1-3 Because of our previous overspending and use of one-time assets, even with one pastor and some trimming of other staff expenses, we need as far as possible to maintain (or increase) our current level of financial giving. (October 1, 2023)

- ii. Hebrews 12: 1-3 With a reduced staff, we will be more reliant on volunteer activity in many areas. (October 8, 2023)
- iii. Romans 12: 3-8 Supporting Geneva can take many forms, from financial giving to volunteering in missional life, congregational life, administration, or other areas — and simply connecting within or outside the congregation or praying. (October 8, 2023)

- iv. Mark 12: 41-46 We recognize that people’s ability to support via financial or volunteer activities may vary, given different financial situations, health situations, or other commitments — and so we ask people to help to the extent that they feel called and able in their current circumstances. (October 15, 2023)

- v. 1 Peter 4: 8-11 As we try to find a path that includes both a degree of continuity and a degree of change, and that tries to be effective in both our evangelical and social-justice commitments in a changing society, we value the support of every single person who is invested in Geneva. (October 22, 2023)

Do not forget that God uses all people to accomplish God’s will. Jesus takes measure not just of God’s standards for the world, but also of God’s hope for the world.

Yes, we must give to the emperor what is demanded. But we also must give to God, what is demanded: love God and others. God has given all the resources humanity needs to live a life of abundance. Everything we have and are, our Life Wallet, can

Volume (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 389-392, 392-394, 395-398, 399-401, 401-402, 403-405, and 405-406.

⁵Source is Ruling Elder John Pomery.

change life for someone, somewhere, somehow. Everything we are and have is a gift from God. The Bible teaches us to tithe, that is give 10% of all that we are cognitively, affectively, physically, and financially in the work of being God's good news in the world.

On this Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost imagine being a tither. Imagine partnering with God and connecting with one another to work toward and hope for a fully invested, loving community who serve and worship and love together. Imagine sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, in word and deed, building unity instead of division. Imagine being a church, working as a team, who serves and loves unconditionally and faithfully.

Now, move from imagination to being a tither, a partner with God connecting with one another to work toward and hope for a fully invested, loving community who serve and worship and love together. Be the good news of Jesus Christ, in word and deed, building unity instead of division. Be church, working as a team, who serves and loves unconditionally and faithfully for the common good. As you use your Life Wallet as God indicates you can in the Bible, you'll bring about a hopeful and just world for all. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 22 October 2023
by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church
in Laguna Woods, California*

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