

Sermon

'Render to Caesar, and to God'

Year B 2021, Pentecost 23, Mark 12.13-17, 28-34



Give to the Emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'

Jesus came to liberate the world. To set us free from this world of sin. To set us free for life with God. For life in the kingdom of God. Now come in Christ. The world will be made perfect, only at Christ's return. It is never, and nowhere, available in the political order of the world.

So long as history continues, God will continue his work, to seek out, and to save the lost. The love of God will continue to search for every single human individual, like a shepherd who leaves his flock to go after the one sheep that is lost until he finds it. Like the poor woman who turns everything in her house upside down until she finds her lost coin. Like the father who rejoices in the return of the lost son.

The Christian idea of God, as the one who searches with an eternal love, for every single individual who is lost, gives to the human individual an eternal value and dignity, unheard of before, or since, the Christian religion. This eternal value, a dignity, of the individual human being, involves Christianity in a permanent revolution. The eternal dignity, of the individual human being, in their relation to God, has radical implication for the political order. It means that the political order has no final claim, no final authority, over the life of the individual citizen. For Christianity, it is God,

and only God, who has the final claim, over the life of the individual. This makes profoundly relative the claim of the political order. Every political order.

Give to the Emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's. 'For freedom, Christ has set us free,' the Apostle proclaimed. 'Therefore, do not submit again, to a yoke of slavery'.

This is still the hour of the principle of liberty. And of a continuous calling for its realisation in all dimensions of human life. But with the modern capture of the principle of liberty, based on Christian freedom, the freedom of the individual in relation to God, by modern secular culture, apart from God, the principle is losing its power. As there appears now, the judgment of God, on the arrogance of a society founded only on itself, founded only on the human person, apart from God. This judgment appears most obviously and clearly in the form of socialism. This ambiguous term mean the subordination in principle of the individual, under some accepted image of society.

This is still the hour of the principle of liberty. This is still the hour of personal autonomy. There is still be time for modern secular society. For a return. For a return to the eternal value of the individual, and of his or her life, in relation to God. By which the political claim, of every human political order, over the life of the individual citizen, is made profoundly relative, to the point of disappearing. The human political order, is not God. This is not the kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is future reality. And, as Christ revealed, the way into the kingdom of God is by self-distinction from God. By making room for God, to be God, within human life. True human citizenship, for every human individual, is in heaven.

The political order has no final claim over the life of the individual citizen. It has only ever a provisional one. Our citizenship, is in heaven.

Nor is there any future for modern western secular society, without God. For a human society, cut off from God. For it is God who is the source of all life on earth. In whom there is any continuity of life in this world.

A human society, cut off from God, the source of its life, can neither survive, nor thrive. We see this failure to thrive, this risk of survival, in modern western secular society today. In the decline of Christianity, leading to the decline of western culture, leading to the decline of western political life. Such as we saw on Capital Hill. Such as we see on Spring Street.

We are witnessing the Fall of the West. How far will it fall? The answer, is that it all depends. On what? On whether or not modern western secular society's turns back from its sin of making itself independent from God. Turns back from its sin of turning its back God. Turns back to God as the source of its life. Turns back to religion, and specifically, the Christian religion.

What is the future of modern western secular society? There is no future, for modern western secular society, without a return to the Christian religion, as the basis of the unity of Western society. There is a future, for modern western secular society, if that society returns to the Christian religion, as the basis of its unity. If the Prodigal Son is to have a future, then the Prodigal Son, must come home. The Prodigal Son, of western society, must return home.

In Jesus' Gospel of the Prodigal Son, what was it that made the Son come home? It was suffering, that led to his return. It was only when he began to feel the pinch, that the Prodigal Son began to make the long return back home. Back home, to the arms of the Father. To the eternal embrace, of His eternal Father. To the eternal embrace, of His eternal Son. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that all who believed in him, may not perish, but have eternal life.

Of God's once for all action, for the liberation of the world, Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, writes,

'All we need to know is that whatever it took – and takes – for us to be set free *has been done* through what happened on Good Friday. The single central thing that we need to grasp is the conviction that for us to be at peace, Jesus life had to be given up. There is an open door that exists in the heart of every situation - a way to peace and praise from any imaginable place. Jesus is there in every human experience. And so every place, has changed.'

Beyond the falsehood, the delusion, of the many this worldly doctrines of liberation - for Christianity, every political doctrine of liberation, liberalism, socialism, is a lie – in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the His Passion, once for all, for the reconciliation of the world to God, Christianity proclaims the good news of the liberation of the world. The liberation of the world, from bondage to temptation and the power of sin, from the sin of every false, this worldly doctrine of redemption, that woo humanity away, from the truth that will set you free. The truth about God. The truth about man. The truth about this world. The truth will set you free. But first it will make you uncomfortable. It comforts the disturbed, and disturbs the comfortable. It comforts the troubled, and troubles the comfortable.

The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

The death and resurrection of Christ is the liberation of the world. From the temptation of evil and sin, leading to death. To a life of righteousness, and life, without end. In the midst of this world that is passing away, in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, world without end, has now come. And with it the liberation of the human race, from this world of temptation, sin and death. Into a world beyond evil, sin and death. Because it is the future kingdom of God, already now.

So come, all is now ready. The Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. So let us celebrate the feast. As we look forward together to returning next week to celebrate the Feast. In the future kingdom of God. That has now come in Jesus Christ. In the midst of an unbelieving, and an unsuspecting world. Here at St Peter's. In beautiful Brighton Beach.