

"The Christian Citizen"

Text Mark 12:13-17

God the Father, through his Holy Spirit, grant you the peace that no human force can ever take from you – the knowledge that your sin-debt has been paid by Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Citizens of a country we have yet to see:

The scenes or themes are as common in modern day movies as weeds in my garden. A man or woman – *against impossible* odds – takes on impossibly powerful forces and, in the end, emerges victorious. That's Hollywood. Hollywood doesn't deal in reality. They deal in what man would like reality to be. Only in Hollywood does the superhero do battle against all the forces of evil, always emerge unscathed, and always succeed in righting a terrible wrong. We see it so often right there on the screen that you wonder how that sort of thing is affecting our national perception of what is real and what is make-believe. In the real world, the impossibly powerful forces tend to always win.

God's Word, on the other hand, deals in reality. Interestingly enough there we do find an amazing "one man against the world" account that defies human perception of likelihood. The difference, of course, is that in God's Word the "one man" is the impossibly powerful force.

So it is that this morning we witness the reality of what happens when mere mortals challenge a force or power beyond their comprehension. The section of God's Word that will tell this story – and thereby guide and instruct us this morning – is found in Mark's Gospel, the 12th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Mark 12:13-17** *And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. ¹⁴ And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" ¹⁵ But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶ And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.*

So far the very words from our God - a rare and precious treasure indeed, for these words have come to us from God himself, and therefore represent the ultimate reality. Pray that that same God who gave us these words would

grant us the wisdom to understand and learn from them. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Have you identified the "impossibly powerful force" in our text? It is, of course, Jesus. The world, then as now, thought otherwise. They saw the strange combination of forces allied against Jesus and identified *them* as the impossible, irresistible power. Then when Jesus was killed, the world assumed that true reality had played out the way it always seems to play out – the irresistibly powerful forces had again triumphed and the "little guy" was crushed.

Christians see things differently. You and I have been given a wisdom from God to see the truth; a wisdom that begins with, and cannot exist apart from, the belief in and fear of the Lord. The result of this God-given wisdom is that we recognize Jesus, the Son of God, as the irresistible force in this text. Once you get this, you get how pathetic it really is whenever human beings believe that they can prevail in their opposition of that incredible divine power.

In our text we find two very different groups that had become allies in their struggle against Jesus. They are listed in our text as **"some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians."** The irony here escapes us unless we learn something about these two groups. The Pharisees were the ultimate Jews – fiercely protective of Jewish laws and customs. The Herodians, on the other hand, were Jewish supporters of Rome. They were known as "Herodians" because of their support of the Herodian line of kings – the dynasty placed and kept in power by Rome. Understand that the two groups really didn't like each other – which is why their alliance against Jesus was so puzzling. How could two groups so opposed to each other become allies?

The answer, of course, is that all of the forces of evil combined against God's Savior. It also explains how or why the Pharisees could also ally themselves with another very different group, the Sadducees. The Pharisees added the written and oral traditions of man to their belief system. The Sadducees claimed to follow only the writings of Moses, but did so very literally and strictly (which is puzzling since they denied the existence of angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the dead – all things that Moses himself taught). The Pharisees were therefore politically conservative (yearning for Jewish independence) but theologically liberal (combining man's word with God's Word). The Sadducees were politically liberal (accepting of Greek and Roman influence and rule) but theologically conservative.

All of these groups found common ground in their hatred for Jesus. All felt threatened by him, both politically and doctrinally. They therefore allied themselves in a plot to discredit and eventually kill him.

Think about that. Men were plotting how they could defeat God. We assume that was because they didn't believe that Jesus *was* God. Their beliefs, as always, failed to dictate reality.

In our text they come to Jesus with what they must have thought was a no-win conundrum. They brought to Jesus one of their own key differences – a problem they saw as insurmountable – and tried to use that problem to trip him up. They must have reasoned that if *they* couldn't solve this problem, then neither could Jesus. You heard in our text the question that represented their problem: **"Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"** The Herodians would have said, "Pay the tax!" The Pharisees would have held the opposite view.

What was the point of their attack? Why did they use this question in their quest to destroy Jesus? In their own minds Jesus would have condemned himself no matter how he answered. Had Jesus said simply *"Yes, pay your taxes."* his popularity with the people would plummeted. Had he said, *"No, do not pay taxes to the occupying Roman government."* he could rightly have been condemned for being subversive and would thereby have given his enemies grounds to condemn and execute him. Think how they would have used his own words against him at his trial when they brought him before the *Roman* Governor Pilate.

Jesus recognized their attack and effortlessly overcame it with his simple answer: **"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."**

This text, however, is not about the Pharisees and Herodians. Their time of grace has long since passed. Nor is it just a nice story where "our guy" wins. This account is about us, and you and I miss the very heart of Jesus' words, this lesson, as applying to us today. As a true master, Jesus didn't just deflect an attack against his person. He didn't, in other words, offer something vague and ambiguous where he, like some modern politician, spoke many words but said nothing. In countering their attack, he taught. What is it he taught?

Note, first of all, that even though their question was about money, Jesus didn't limit his answer to money. In other words, he didn't say, *"Render to Caesar the money that is Caesar's, and to God the money that is God's."* He said **"things."** All things, any things. By saying what he did, Jesus laid the foundation for our understanding of dual citizenship as Christians. You and I are citizens of the United States – whose birthday we commemorate tomorrow. But that's just temporary. We are also – more importantly –

citizens of Christ's kingdom. No matter how passionate or patriotic we feel about the former, our ultimate loyalty *must always rest with the latter.* We are, first and foremost, Christ's ambassadors and citizens of his heavenly kingdom.

This is more than just a pious-sounding cliché. It is a critically important fact that you and I need to both reexamine and acknowledge on a daily basis. It is to be the guiding force or directive in all that we say and do. This too falls under the Bible's directive: **"...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."** In fact if this fact is forgotten, Satan can and will use it as a wedge to divide God's Church and impair the Great Commission.

In practical terms then, what exactly are we talking about here?

Have you ever heard reference to our form of government as "the Great Experiment"? The phrase goes all the way back to George Washington. What made it an "experiment" is that never before had a civilized society created a class-free society where not only were all human beings considered to be equal and *"endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,"* but those people were themselves *the government.* Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, later referred to that Great Experiment as *"government of the people, by the people, for the people."* Our ultimate governing document is the Constitution of the United States and the ultimate human authority is *"We the People."* Simply put, that means you and me, and it means that you and I have certain responsibilities.

As with so many other things in life, this is just a fact, and it doesn't matter whether you believe it or not for it to be true. Fathers are fathers. Mothers are mothers. The only variable is whether you are a good father or a bad father; a good mother or a bad mother. So also you are an employee, a husband, a wife, a son or daughter, a church member. Again, the only variable, the only question, is whether you are faithful or not in your God-given roles. Same with citizenship in this great country. You are, individually, more than just subjects. You are a part of the ultimate human authority as established by our form of government. Again, the only question is whether you will be good or bad in this role; whether you will accept and honor the role you are expected to play or whether you will abrogate or shirk your duties and responsibilities.

While reasonable Christians can legitimately differ concerning their ideas of how best to govern, vote, speak, and so forth, the one thing that is not an option to Christian citizens is to shirk our duties. Will we always get our way? Of course not. Will my one voice always make a difference? Probably not. It matters not. When Jesus said, **"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's"** he gave direction to you and me today as citizens of the United States.

But here is where the dual citizenship aspect of our existence comes into play – critically so. Jesus didn't just say, "**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.**" He also added that all important, "**and to God the things that are God's.**"

Make no mistake here. Jesus' emphasis was not on Caesar; it was on God. The Jews were all about the Caesar things – and they were devouring each other over those differences. What they lacked was God, which is the foundation.

This is a crucial lesson for us today. Our lives here are not all about our lives here; they are all about our lives there – in heaven with our Lord. Christians can and have survived and operated under virtually every other form of government. The fact is the one we have offers tremendous freedom to carry out our Great Commission to "**Go and make disciples of all nations**" and to worship our God without fear of retribution or persecution. Our churches are on street corners, not in catacombs. Our very name - "Christians" – reminds us that our ultimate loyalty is to Christ Jesus, our Savior. We recognize that faith alone in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

This is what makes us different. This is what gives meaning, purpose, and direction to our "passing through" lives here on this earth. Life here is not about life here. It is all about the life that comes after this one. Here we have responsibilities, but our ultimate responsibility is to save souls, not to fix what is irrevocably broken in this world. It is certainly not to get everything we can out of this world while we have the chance. How do we then carry out our responsibilities as those passing through this life as citizens of God's kingdom? By sharing with our neighbor the simple truth of the gospel, which alone can save. We are different because Christianity is different. Only the Christian faith teaches that man has nothing at all to offer to a holy God to pay for our sins. Nothing. Only Christianity teaches that the "goodness" that we need to enter heaven does not come from us; it has to be supplied by another and credited to us. This is why we are called "Christians," because we believe that Jesus Christ supplied the goodness, the perfection, that we need to be saved. Note: *not to save ourselves* – to *be saved*. Our hope, our confidence when we stand before our God never rests in what we have done. It rests in Jesus Christ and what *he* has done, what *he* has provided. On the cross *he* offered his perfect life as the payment for the sins of all mankind. You and I bring only sin and failure, but that is exactly what it means to be saved by grace (*undeserved* love), not by works. God has accepted the payment of his Son as sufficient to satisfy the entire sin-debt of all mankind. And that payment, that perfection, is our individual, personal possession by grace through faith. Believing it is true, it is ours. Believing that Jesus paid our sin debt, God himself regards that faith as the equivalent of perfect obedience and holiness. We are perfect in

his sight only because we believe that Jesus alone provided our sin payment.

You want to be a good citizen? You want to serve your country or your fellow human beings? There simply is no greater opportunity than to clearly and relentlessly identify for your fellow citizens, your neighbors, the truths of the Christian faith – how they too can be saved. There is no other path, no other plan or belief system that can save. The one path to God's heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ. "**He that believes and is baptized will be saved. He that does not believe will be condemned.**"

It is just that simple. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Proverbs 14:26-35** In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. ²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death. ²⁸ In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined. ²⁹ Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. ³⁰ A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. ³¹ Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. ³² The wicked is overthrown through his evildoing, but the righteous finds refuge in his death. ³³ Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding, but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools. ³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. ³⁵ A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:11-17** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. ¹³ ¶ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President

Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 3, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 578 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, While for All Mankind We Pray"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Proverbs 14:26-35) The Proverbs are rich fare – most often best appreciated in private study with much thought and contemplation. On this anniversary of our country's birth date, we note especially the verses in our first reading that pertain to the spiritual health and wellbeing of our country. The bottom line is that no country can turn away from God and long endure. God is not mocked.

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 146 (Brown Hymnal page 41)

The New Testament Lesson: (1 Peter 2:11-17) Our second reading gives practical advice concerning our responsibilities as Christian citizens. Obviously every country needs good citizens. The point Peter is here making is that the ultimate goal of Christian citizens is to live as ambassadors for Jesus Christ and to lead others to know Him as their Savior. Recognize this as your life's work. We have no greater.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –575 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Before the Lord We Bow"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 12:13-17 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Christian as Citizen"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -575 (Verses 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Before the Lord We Bow"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - (Bulletin Insert)

"America the Beautiful"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (46) Ave (46) Tuesday (165)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Ascension Lutheran of Batavia (Chicago area). Pastor David Fuerstenau is considering the call to Prince of Peace of Hecla, SD. Pastor Michael Roehl is considering the call to Mt Zion of Detroit. Teacher Paul Tiefel III is considering the call to St Stephen School of San Francisco. Faith of Markesan has called Pastor Caleb Schaller. Pastor George Dummah has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids. Pastor Bruce Naumann has been called as a fulltime resident (visiting) missionary. Mr. Timothy Daub has passed his second colloquy and is therefore eligible for a pastoral call in the CLC.

Men's Retreat – A CLC men's retreat is being planned for Friday, August 26 through Sunday, August 28 at Wyalusing State Park near Prairie du Chien, WI (an hour south of La Crosse). The cost is \$75 for the weekend which includes lodging, meals, T-shirt, and activities. Registration deadline is August 1, 2016. www.manup.clclutheran.org.

Church Picnic – A reminder that our annual church picnic has been scheduled for Sunday, July 17. Details will follow, but please save the date. We had also planned to conduct our organ dedication service on that day, but the Church Council will be revisiting that plan, given the fact that Mr. Hay will not now be able to attend on the 17th.

CLC Convention – St Paul Congregation was very ably represented at the recent synodical convention in Eau Claire by our Chairman, Mike McEnroe. In addition to his other duties on the Floor Committee for Finance, Mr. McEnroe served as the convention reporter (spokesman) for that Floor Committee – which means he presented the Committee's report to the Convention as a whole. Mr. McEnroe, together with the Pastor, will be presenting a comprehensive report to the congregation in the coming weeks. Please also read through the summary on the bulletin insert.