

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026
TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
MATTHEW 22:15-22 "WHOSE HEAD"

St. John United Church of Christ

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist/Pianist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "Give Me Jesus" Tom Fettke

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Neighbors in Need

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP (inspired by Psalm 96)**

One: Sing to the Holy One, all the earth. Declare God's glory!

Many: Great is the Holy One, who made the heavens and the earth.

One: Sing a new song unto the Holy One. Join with all creation in praise and reverence!

Many: We witness God's marvelous works among the peoples.

One: Worship the Holy One, all the earth! Declare God's sovereignty!

Many: Rejoice and be glad! God is great!

***INVOCATION:**

Sovereign and Radiant God, you go before us and invite us to meet you. Today, we gather in your presence as a community. You gift us "the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places." We respond as you call us by name. We come to know you as you invite us to be known, by you. Receive our worship and form us as your people in justice, truth, righteousness, compassion, and love. Be glorified among us and through us, we pray. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 459 "Come, O Fount of Every Blessing"**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Gracious God, you have revealed yourself in scripture, prophets, and the Christ. Yet, we have reduced your gospel of liberation for all people, restoration of all creation, and redemption for the world into personal piety and devotion. We make idols of the trappings of empire, trusting in our own plots and plans while failing to believe and trust you with bold, transformative prayers. Help us, O God, live in faith and access your power. Remind us that you equip and endow us to be your body in the world so that all may flourish and experience abundance. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, Creator continues to do a new thing in you and will strengthen and encourage you to be bold and faithful in the journey. Receive the invitation to new and full life in Christ. Reject hopelessness, fatalism, and despair. That is not your portion. God has given you a spirit to live in the kingdom and be ambassadors and agents of the good news for the glory of God and the good of the world.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 33:12-23

Moses pleads with God

¹² Moses said to the Lord, “Look, you’ve been telling me, ‘Lead these people forward.’ But you haven’t told me whom you will send with me. Yet you’ve assured me, ‘I know you by name and think highly of you.’” ¹³ Now if you do think highly of me, show me your ways so that I may know you and so that you may really approve of me. Remember too that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴ The Lord replied, “I’ll go myself, and I’ll help you.”

¹⁵ Moses replied, “If you won’t go yourself, don’t make us leave here. ¹⁶ Because how will anyone know that we have your special approval, both I and your people, unless you go with us? Only that distinguishes us, me and your people, from every other people on the earth.”

¹⁷ The Lord said to Moses, “I’ll do exactly what you’ve asked because you have my special approval, and I know you by name.”

¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glorious presence.”

¹⁹ The Lord said, “I’ll make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I’ll proclaim before you the name, ‘The Lord.’ I will be kind to whomever I wish to be kind, and I will have compassion to whomever I wish to be compassionate. ²⁰ But,” the Lord said, “you can’t see my face because no one can see me and live.” ²¹ The Lord said, “Here is a place near me where you will stand beside the rock. ²² As my glorious presence passes by, I’ll set you in a gap in the rock, and I’ll cover you with my hand until I’ve passed by. ²³ Then I’ll take away my hand, and you will see my back, but my face won’t be visible.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 99 Page 687

NEW TESTAMENT: Acts 10:34-43

³⁴ Peter said, “I really am learning that God doesn’t show partiality to one group of people over another. ³⁵ Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all! ³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. ³⁸ You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of everything he

did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to be seen, ⁴¹ not by everyone but by us. We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with him after God raised him from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

***GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-22**

Question about taxes

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees met together to find a way to trap Jesus in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are genuine and that you teach God’s way as it really is. We know that you are not swayed by people’s opinions, because you don’t show favoritism. ¹⁷ So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” ¹⁸ Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, “Why do you test me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used to pay the tax.” And they brought him a denarion. ²⁰ “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked. ²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said, “Give to Caesar what belongs to

Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”²² When they heard this they were astonished, and they departed.

MESSAGE:

Today’s lesson from Jesus is so straight forward, what else can a preacher say about it; Jesus is very clever. You’ll be glad to know I found something to say; sorry. I thought we might find a little deeper information about our Bibles; what things are called and why the author decided to include this passage in his gospel. These things are what I would call “nice to know” facts. Not important but just nice to know. It may solve some mysteries we have about our Bibles. So here goes.

The lection today is the first of four, what is called, question-and-answer encounters between Jesus and Jewish leaders in Jerusalem during the closing days of Jesus’ life. Of these four, all but the second involve the Pharisees. These four confrontations are set by Matthew between the three parables against Israel and Jesus’ scathing word against scribes and Pharisees in Chapter 23. We have that to look forward to.

The form of our text is that of a “pronouncement story”, a unit of material that consists of a pronouncement of Jesus cradled in a simple narrative relating the barest essentials as framework for the pronouncement. These stories probably circulated in a variety of contexts as the church looked to the authority

of Jesus’ words to address opponents and critics. Matthew 22 follows the basic outline of Mark 12; questioners come to Jesus with flattering lips and hostile intent; they pose the question of paying taxes to Rome; Jesus perceives their evil design; Jesus asks for a coin, and notice how quickly the Pharisees present one from their pockets. The disciples probably have no coins in their pockets and neither does Jesus. The Pharisees pose their question; Jesus answers their question; they marvel and go away. Foiled again by Jesus.

The interrogators of Jesus are Pharisees, the major party to survive the wars with Rome. Because the Pharisees were the principal representatives of Judaism in Matthew’s day (50 years or more after Jesus). The Pharisees were concerned with interpretation of the Torah and they operated out of the synagogue, debates between them and Jesus had direct transfer value for Matthew’s church (50 years or more after Jesus) in its debate with the synagogue. The debate we read today was a plan to entrap Jesus and involved sending to Jesus a delegation of Pharisees and their disciples and were accompanied by Herodians. Its not hard to understand who the Herodians were; they followed Herod, the “bad guy” in the Bible. This “delegation” to trick Jesus is very interesting. The Pharisees and Herodians don’t agree on anything, yet here they are joining forces. The Pharisees were actually not fond of the taxes and sparked many

Roman-Jewish clashes. Herodians, however, supported the Roman-endorsed Herod dynasty and, therefore, they were in favor of the taxes. So this delegation represented both yes and no on the tax issue; so they were sure Jesus would displease someone in his answer.

Jesus' response to the question did not and does not solve the problem, but simply defines the nature of the struggle. For Jesus, discerning what is God's and what is Caesar's was a test or temptation. For the early church, the task of interpreting Jesus' statement continued; how is the Christian to relate to political structures. (Sound familiar?) For those who call Caesar "Lord" and for those who call Caesar "Satan", answers are simple. But if the church can at times support and at times must resist the state, then the answers are never simple nor are they final; the struggle resumes with every new situation.

From this wrestling Jesus was not exempt. In fact, in his decisions he was finally alone, with church and state conspiring against him. One can hardly imagine a heavier demand – called upon to obey God, not simply in the face of political wrath but without the support of the community of faith. But it still happens. AMEN

SPECIAL MUSIC: "Come Away with Me My Love"

Flute – Stacie Pickens, Piano – Sharon Banjavcic

PASTORAL PRAYER:

OUR LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 773

Remember me, remember me.

O Jesus, remember me.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

The offerings we bring before the Holy One do not function as a tax. They are a gift given freely. At times, we give sacrificially. Mostly, we give from the abundance that the Holy One has seeded throughout all creation. Let us give generously, hopefully, and lovingly knowing that needs will be met and lives will be changed through our ministry.

OFFERTORY: "Where Cross the Crowded Ways"

Roger C. Wilson

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God above you heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING**

God of good and perfect gifts receive our humble gifts of time, talent, and treasure. May they contribute to a world of abundance and your kingdom come. May we experience the joy and privilege of giving as a gift in and of itself. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 52 “There is a Name I Love to Hear”**

***BENEDICTION:**

Remember, you belong to the kingdom of God.

As you go, embody the good news of the Holy One in the world.

May the Love of God envelop you.

May the Presence of God encourage and embolden you.

And, may the Spirit of God guide you.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571

O God of Love, O God of Peace

Make wars throughout the world to cease.

The wrath of human wrong restrain;

Give peace, O God, give peace again.

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: “Come with Rejoicing” R. S. Morrison

PRAYER LIST: Cindy Jablonski, Carol Bulva, Jim Warning, Kim Holmes, Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Wayne Huss, our Beloved Country.