

“Truth Teaching”
20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 18, 2020
Rev. Floren“Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
Iao United Church of Christ

1st Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22

Poem: “Reflection of Truth” by Suzy Kassem

*“Where you find Truth
Is where you find your reflection
And where you find your reflection
Is where you find love
And where you find love
Is where you find light
And where you find light
Is where you find faith
And where you find faith
Is where you find purpose
And where you find purpose
Is where you find happiness
And where you find happiness
Is where you find Truth
And where you find Truth
Truth will set you free.”*

I have found it interesting that many question the “patriotism” of the church with their erroneous belief that “churches do not pay ‘taxes.’” When in fact, we as a whole church, as the whole body of Christ – give to Caesar what is Caesar, and we give to God what is God’s. Iao Church pays income taxes, gross domestic taxes, sales tax, state tax to name a few. Granted that as a 501c3 Church, we fall under a different IRS Tax Code than most non-profits. Many have said and continue to say that “the church should stay out of politics since

they do not pay ‘taxes.’” To say such a statement brings us to our scripture reading this morning in what the Pharisees and Herodians wanted to say about Jesus and his followers. Stay out of politics Jesus and disciples – you don’t pay taxes to Caesar! As if to say that only the people who have a voice are those who patriotically pay taxes.

The argument that the Church a whole should be silent in times of injustices is like trying to put Jesus to the test once again. On one hand they approached Jesus and his disciples with such kindness and curiosity with – “Teacher” as if they really accepted him or his teachings. “Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.” Really now? Pharisees and Herodians of our time, you now would have us to believe that you are all into the teachings of Jesus? You see beloved community – if they thought that Jesus was teaching “the way of God in accordance with truth” – would they even be questioning him and his disciples in such a manner as to trap them? Our Iao Church members, non-members, friends, supporters – together we all make up who we are as Iao United Church of Christ. Each one of us in some way gives to the emperor what is the emperor’s – but the things of God belong to God. Truth telling means that we do not stand idly by while injustices happen around us – that is not what produces “good fruit.” We give our dues to whom we give our dues – but to God is God’s alone. We can walk and chew gum at the same time just like everyone else – pay taxes AND speak up against the injustices of any emperor.

You see beloved community; the closer Jesus and his disciples were getting to Jerusalem the more entrapments were being thrown at them. “They eat

with sinners!” “They work on the sabbath!” “We believe in you and in what you teach...but!” Questioning Jesus’ authority and comparing it to that of an emperor. Questioning the authority given to Iao Church against that of our government. In essence, they are saying that “those who pay taxes give their allegiance to the empire.” Our question for us today beloved Church is – where do our values lie? By what criteria or authority do we call out the injustices of the emperor and empire? At some point the Church and all of its members that make up the Church will have to answer for its values and decisions. What is it that we believe in writing vs. what have we really done in action? You see beloved community – we the Church must answer to the things that are of God – speaking up against locking up children in cages, feeding the poor, healing the sick, quenching the thirst of others, loving the unloved of our societies, clothing the naked. We will and we must have an answer to this vital question of what makes us a “Church!” “When was it Jesus?” When was it Jesus that we did all these things or when was it that we did not do these things? Each and every day, we need to ask ourselves this vital question and we must be truth tellers. When was it that we spoke up against the injustices of this world even if it goes against the wishes of the emperor and empire?

Many would like us to believe that Jesus was in no way political when in fact everything he did made a political statement in some way. Part of our truth telling is to bring the scriptures alive – overturning the tables of the money changers was a political statement. Cursing the fig tree for not producing fruit or telling the religious leaders that the kingdom of God would be taken away from some and given to those who produce good fruit was a political statement. The door will be open to those who produce good fruit and shut to others like the

Pharisees and Herodians was and is a political statement – Jesus was into truth telling! Amen! You see beloveds, statements like these challenged their authority – statements pointed out that their allegiance was misdirected, pointed out their place of privilege and questioned their sense of patriotism. One cannot serve two masters – in this case, one cannot serve many masters – money, power, privilege, or God. We must choose one and hopefully the better of these – that is truth telling beloved Church!

The Pharisees and Herodians presumed that by using their power and privilege for their benefit would trap Jesus into saying something wrong against the church or against Caesar. “Say something wrong Jesus so that we can finally discredit you!” Recalling that not so long ago in this passage, they called him “Teacher – teaching the way sincere way of God.” They went after his faith and after his patriotism. They were seeking only one answer – the “wrong” answer that would finally prove to their followers and those listening how much of a fake he was and how big of a threat Jesus and his followers were to the Roman empire. He, Jesus was “fake news” and his beliefs were against the empire. “We have no king but Caesar! We have the ancient writings from our forefathers – we are God’s chosen nation. Tell us Jesus, is it right to pay taxes?” Let us ask this question beloved Iao Church – is it right to pay taxes?

Can we just feel the tense atmosphere that these religious leaders created? All eyes glaring at Jesus because the poor were being taxed to the brim. All eyes of the Roman Soldiers were glaring at Jesus waiting for him to say something against Caesar and the empire. They thought they had created a scenario where no matter what Jesus answered, it was going to go against empire or church. A

“there is no right answer” type of scenario to their question – “is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?”

Truth telling begins! “Show me the coin used for the tax.” So they brought him a denarius. Then Jesus asks them – “whose head is this and whose title?” “The emperor’s” – they responded. Truth telling Iao Church! Truth telling beloved virtual world! Then he said to them – “give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.” Beloveds, this is how our scripture reading ends for today – “they were amazed; and they left him and went away.” I would think that these religious leaders would have already been “amazed” with the feeding of the fifteen-thousand people or that people who were once blind could see or that those who were once lame could walk again. Wouldn’t that be something that they should have been amazed by? And now, they want to be amazed on how Jesus refused to fall for their trap? One would think that we should all be amazed on how well we treat humanity. Amen?

Let us close with this beloveds. Patriotism when done through the lens of Jesus is a good thing. When the citizens of a nation are being fed, cared for when everyone has equal access, equal pay, equal treatment of the law, when no one is left behind, etc. – that is a nation that is producing good fruit. As a nation, are we producing good fruit today beloveds? It is good to pay taxes to make sure that everyone’s needs are met – that everyone has equal right to work for a living and produce good fruit for the sake of our societies. Our ultimate allegiance is to God – for God and God alone be the glory.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.