

THE EPIPHANY STAR
News from the Church of the Epiphany
Issue #4, November 2017



Notes from the Wardens: It looks like fall has arrived. We have endured a few frosts, finished up the gardening work and now it is time to rake the leaves. It is time to slow down and enjoy those beautiful fall sunsets. Don't forget to turn your clocks back this coming weekend. The Explorer's group enjoyed an evening watching the DVD "I AM" by Tom Shadyac. I encourage all to watch this enriching, enlightening story. We all thoroughly enjoyed this. I went right to Amazon and purchased a used one so I can watch it again!

GIVING TO CAESAR, GIVING TO GOD

A sermon preached by the Rev. Elizabeth Gillett

October 22, 2017

Matthew 22: 15 - 22

Do you think that we have a tax problem in this country? Do you think that, as some people have suggested, we ought to do away with the IRS as we know it? Then take a look at Israel at the time of Jesus. In every country occupied by Rome, any resident who was not a Roman citizen had to pay a land tax, a head tax, and many other various taxes collected by the hated Jewish tax collectors, who inflated them so that they could keep the difference.

The people then had to come up with civil taxes, which supported the lavish life styles of King Herod and his successors. And then, on top of all that, was the temple tax which had to be paid every year in the month preceding Passover. The effect of all these taxes was that the majority of the Jewish people were unable to have even a modestly comfortable standard of living.

Not only was it onerous and irreligious for them to have to pay such oppressive taxes to uphold the power that was degrading them, it also it was debasing to them to have to pay these taxes in Roman coinage that bore the blasphemous inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest." We complain about our taxes, but at least we have the right to vote for those who determine them.

So when the Pharisees, who have already decided to find a way to kill Jesus, try to entangle him in his talk, the tax angle is a clever way to try to trap him. There was no middle ground on

the subject of taxes. If Jesus said that it was right to "render unto Caesar," he would be renouncing his messiahship, since no Jewish messiah would ever condone paying taxes to Rome. On the other hand, if he came out against paying taxes to Rome, he could be accused of treason and be arrested on the spot. So Jesus finds himself in the classic double bind, damned if he does and damned if he doesn't.

So what does Jesus do? Well, here as everywhere else in the Gospels, Jesus lives by his own teaching. He doesn't fret over what to say or moan about being between a rock and a hard place. He has faced this kind of challenge before, in the wilderness. Just as Satan came to put him to the test in the desert, so the Pharisees do here. But, in both situations, Jesus relies upon God in all things, for all things, and emerges the winner. This is the source of his engrafted wisdom that traps those who would entrap him.

Jesus asks for a denarius, the coin which is stamped with the image of the emperor Tiberius, and the Pharisees give him one. "Whose head is this and whose title?" he asks them. "The emperor's," they reply. Jesus uses their answer in giving his own: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and give to God the things that are God's." A very clever answer!

This raises the question which all of us have faced or tried to dodge, and that is, "What is God's?" Jesus, in other words, puts **us** to the test. He challenges us to decide, and he will not answer for us. In his graciousness, he gives us that terrible freedom.

We don't have that freedom when it comes to paying our own "Caesar." We know exactly what we have to pay in federal taxes, state taxes, school taxes, property taxes, sales tax, and all the minor taxes that we take for granted. We also know the consequences if we don't pay them.

But Jesus doesn't make rules or threats. And, ideally, we don't need to be told what to give to whom, because we know that ultimately everything belongs to God who created it. As Jesus' friends and partners in ministry, **we give to God first, before Caesar or anyone else.** We give out of a **relationship of love, gratitude, and partnership**, as a response to God's giving to us.

This may sound unrealistic, not having much to do with the cold facts that face us when we sit down to lay our bills. But, if that is the case, we need to ask ourselves why we are in church on Sunday mornings. Are we there putting in time because we feel that we have to for some reason, or are we there because we have a precious gift from God which feeds, supports, and energizes us? If it is latter, if we are there because we have a precious investment in this particular part of the family of God and God's ministry, isn't that investment worth nurturing and protecting?

The Church of the Epiphany is an all-too-human vessel for a much greater heritage and identity which go back to approximately 1,500 years before Christ. Here we belong to a faith community in which **we always have a place.** Here, we have a **sense of stability and accountability** in an increasingly chaotic world. The language of our faith may change, but the **content and meaning of our Scriptures, our sacraments, and our creeds never do.** Here, **we have values** which serve as a challenge and an example, and which **give meaning, purpose, and structure** to our lives.

This is what it means to be partners in a faith community and partners with God in ministry. In our making of our choices as to what to give to God, the Church treats us as partners, just as God does. We are reminded that **it is our privilege** to give to God, that Biblical giving is the tithe, of ten percent, of our income. We are giving the opportunity to grow spiritually through the commitment of a pledge. We are accorded the respect of partners who have an effect upon the

health, life, and direction of God's presence in the world, rather than as hired help who have no power or responsibility to make a difference.

Back in the 1970's, when I was wrestling with becoming a tither, my rector said to me, "Elizabeth, tithing is a Jewish concept. Christians give everything." Well, that rocked me back on my heels at first, but later I understood what he meant. Our money, talents, and time which we have to give to God are only a small symbol of what we really have to give, which is **our selves**. That is why our money, talent, and time are important, because they are powerful outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual gift, and **that gift is our selves**.

Giving our selves is not something that is easy to do. When we take it seriously, it often is very frightening. We fear failure, but we also fear success. As the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor writes in one of her books: "To be God's partner is to enter into relationship with the Creator of Heaven and Earth, a relationship in which there is no room for calculated risks or guarantees of safety. To be God's friend is to plunge right into the darkest mysteries of the universe and to swim towards the Light, taking as much of the world to the surface with you as you can...."

Giving our selves, being partners with God, is not something that we are ever ready to do. This is why Jesus reminds us that we did not choose him. "I chose you," he says, "and appointed you that you should bear much fruit, and that your fruit should endure...." (John 15:16) God has chosen us, not for our brains, not for our beauty, and certainly not for our faithfulness, but because God loves us. God has chosen us, not to be the hired help, but to be partners and friends. Amen.

Note: When we think about our giving in the context of our faith, we realize that it is really a spiritual issue rather than simply a financial one. If anyone is wrestling with these issues and would like support, I am happy to meet with you to talk and listen in confidence. In typical Episcopal fashion, I will not judge you or tell you what to do, but I am happy to offer support and any possible benefit of my own struggles. - Elizabeth+

Highlights of the October Vestry Meeting, 2017

Vestry minutes summary from October: Will be discussing an amount for the discretionary fund when Elizabeth is back and can give us some input. Bill Bergner, Jr. has had some luck with contractors and 2 people will be submitting bids. They are Dennis Schlaefter and Paul Jones. John Cook will speak with Jeff Webster and see if he too would like to submit a bid. Vestry will be coming up with some respectful expectations for the Nursery School.

- We are in need of a clerk of the vestry (this is open to non-vestry members) Please consider this.

Parishioners in the News

Congratulations to the Rev. Donna Howard Steckline who was ordained to the priesthood in the Diocese of Albany on Sunday, October 29th, and to her family and parents, Jack and Ann Howard.

Congratulations also to Dorothy Lehman who is doing well in rehab as she recovers from breaking her knee cap, and to Joanne Nigolian who also is recovering well from an injury to her leg.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Pete Benedict as he recuperates from recent hip surgery.

Important dates in November and December

November

Sunday, November 5 -- **All Saints Sunday, also Daylight Savings Time ends.** Set your clocks back one hour so that you don't arrive at church an hour early.

Tuesdays November 7, 14, 21, and 28 -- The **Explorers adult education group** meets from 6:45 - 8:00 PM at Jan Nigolian's house.

Friday, November 10 and Saturday, November 11 - **Diocesan Convention** in Liverpool.

Saturday, November 18 -- **Church bazaar**—there will be themed baskets for sale. Donations are still needed. We already have a coffee basket, a baby girl basket, a baby boy basket, a Christmas basket a dog basket and a cleaning basket. Please call Gail Morgan with your theme so there are no duplicates at 674-9417. Please donate a bag of candy for the large candy dish raffle, or cash and Gail will buy candy for you! The menu for the day will include macaroni and cheese and chili. Set-up for the bazaar is the friday night before at 5:00. Please help if you are able.

Sunday, November 19 -- Sherburne ecumenical Council of Churches **Thanksgiving Service, 7:00PM**, at St. Malachy's Roman Catholic Church, the Rev. George Gallandorm preaching. Also at 3:00PM, the installation of the Rev. Allen Armstrong at the UCC Church.

December

Sunday, December 3 -- **First Sunday of Advent, Dedication of the village Crèche, 5:00PM**, grounds of the UCC Church.

Sunday, December 24th -- **Fourth Sunday of Advent -- no morning service, Christmas Eve Festive Eucharist, 7:00PM**, the Rev. Elizabeth Gillett presiding.

Sunday, December 31 -- New Year's Eve, **9:00AM worship as usual.**

Website Up and Running

The church of the Epiphany has a website! To check it out, go to: <http://epiphanysherburne.church/> The wardens would appreciate your comments and responses. Many thanks to Anita and Henry Drexler for bringing this effort to fruition and for agreeing to be our webmasters.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS, WEDDING AND BAPTISM ANNIVERSARIES

BIRTHDAYS

Jacob Lamb
Tristan Fitzpatrick
Mark Nigolian
Kathy McDaniels
Wilbur Raville

BAPTISM ANNIVERSARIES

Dylan Tyler Camenga
Jane Palmiter
Harlie Stowell, Jr.
Charles Drexler
Carly Britton

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

None for November

Colten Camenga
Lee McDuffie
Mark Hill
Mary Cook
John Powell
Wayne Murray
Joanne Nigolian
Whitney Palmer
Ava Jean Bohnert
Cheryl Fleming
Laurie Hawkins

A news sheet with important dates will be sent out for December, and the Newsletter will resume with a January Issue.

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