

Apart but Together Worship

Hornsea URC Sunday 7th March 2021 – Lent in plain sight : COINS



Welcome to you all whether you are reading this, joining us live or watching later. Thanks to the wonders of technology and the gift of the Holy Spirit whilst we may be physically apart we are together and ready to worship.

So let us begin with a prayer. This prayer was written by Erasmus of Rotterdam who lived from 1466-1536. He was an influential figure in both the Renaissance and the Reformation.

O God of love, you are the true sun of the world, evermore risen and never going down: We pray you to shine in our hearts and drive away the darkness of sin and the mist of error. We pray that we may, this day and all our lives long, walk without stumbling in the way you have prepared for us, which is Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting, **Amen.**

Let's look at this familiar object.



Coins were and still are important even in these days of plastic cards. In the past they were used by rulers to tell the people who they were. They were a way of reinforcing the sense of being part of a community with one ruler, clearly shown, and what that ruler wanted the people to believe about them.

What does this coin show us?

It shows us the ruler is Queen Elizabeth and we can see, in a sense, what she looks like.

It also has an inscription.
What does that tell us?

It is in abbreviated Latin :

ELIZABETH II.DEI.GRA.REG.FID.DEF.2020

In full this is the Latin words :

ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA REGINA FIDEI DEFENSATRIX

Translated it says :

**Elizabeth the Second,
by the Grace of God, Queen, Defender of the Faith.**

A lot to get across in a very short space.

We sing the hymn : Praise my soul – [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Now let us look at this coin.



What does it show?

It also has an inscription.
What does it tell us?

It also is in abbreviated Latin :

Ti Caesar Divi Avg F Avgvstvs

Here it is in full :

Tiberivs Caesar Divi Avgvsti Filivs Avgvstvs

Here it is translated into English :

Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus

Now let us look at a reading from the Bible featuring this coin.

Mark 12.13-17 :

The Question about Paying Taxes

¹³ Some Pharisees and some members of Herod's party were sent to Jesus to trap him with questions. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you tell the truth, without worrying about what people think. You pay no attention to anyone's status, but teach the truth about God's will for people. Tell us, is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor? Should we pay them or not?"

¹⁵ But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, "Why are you trying to trap me? Bring a silver coin, and let me see it."

¹⁶ They brought him one, and he asked, "Whose face and name are these?"

"The Emperor's," they answered.

¹⁷ So Jesus said, "Well, then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay to God what belongs to God."

And they were amazed at Jesus.

A reflection

I am grateful to Fay Rowland for these thoughts. She is an author and graduate student at Wesley House in Cambridge.

'Render unto Caesar' is one of the phrases which has passed from the Bible into common

speech. We use it as we sigh and fill in our tax returns! At least this year we know it is doing good, supporting our wonderful but woefully overstretched NHS. And it is good, both for giver and receiver, to give some of our cash to benefit others.

The trouble is Jesus wasn't talking about giving. That word render isn't very helpful. The Greek word is *apodidomi* meaning to give, to pay or (and it is relevant here) to payback. In many ancient cultures and in our own not so long ago, the monarch owned everything. Really everything. It's why Queen Elizabeth I could go on a grand tour around England and stay at any noble's house she chose eating, drinking and moving on without any thought of payment. Everything was her's anyway. The nobles were only looking after it on her behalf. Anything they gave her was just giving her back her own stuff.

Mind you, I don't suppose it felt like that for the nobles when they had been used to spending their groats and sovereigns however they liked. Now the actual sovereign comes along and demands a reckoning. (Didn't Jesus have a parable about that?)

And so it was with Roman tax money. It was all Caesar's anyway said Jesus as it has his picture and his inscription, so paying taxes was just giving him back his own stuff.

And what about rendering to God? When I give to God do I think of it as giving or giving back? The time that I have is from God. The money that I have is from God. The job I have, the family I have, the house I have, the health I have, the opportunities I have are all from God. But it's easy to forget. It is all God's anyway and I'm just giving him back his own stuff. So what do I think? Isn't this thought a good place to begin. All these oh so clever people coming along to try and catch out Jesus. The whole gang of them have come to trip him up and put him in the wrong. If he says give the money to the Romans the ordinary people will be furious. They will think Jesus is a traitor to the Jewish cause. If he says give the money to God they will go back and report him to the Roman authorities. They will see him as a rabble rousing terrorist who needs putting down, if not eliminating.

So Jesus draws everybody's attention to the coin they have in their pocket. What does it say? 'Tiberius- son of the divine Augustus' in plain words Tiberius is the son of god. Now no self respecting Jew would ever say such a title belonged to a Roman, even if he was the emperor. It makes me think of the times I have tried to be clever, it never works. The times I have been a hypocrite and felt afterwards so unworthy. The times Jesus has not given me the answer I want and I have had a sulk. Jesus takes all the cleverness, the posing in his stride and sees it for what it is. Jesus sees me for what I am. Yet I know Jesus loves me.

Prayer : An opportunity to bring your own prayer to God in response to all we have heard together so far.

We sing the hymn : Majesty – [CLICK HERE TO WATCH/LISTEN](#)

Here is another coin



What do you think about this one?

It is tiny, made of bronze, so cheap to make and is known as a lepton. They were first produced by a Maccabean king of Judah some 100 years before Jesus.

Now let us listen to a reading from the Bible featuring this coin.

Luke 21.1-2

Jesus looked around and saw rich people dropping their gifts in the Temple treasury, 2 and he also saw a very poor widow dropping in two little copper coins.

A reflection

This always reminds me of what a preacher said in our church about this reading. It reminded them of the story of the chicken and the pig. The chicken said 'I've an idea. Let's do something for the farmer who looks after us. Let's make her breakfast. How about a breakfast of bacon and eggs.' The pig replied 'It's all very well for you. You're just making an offering; I'm making a sacrifice!'

The poor widow, and being a widow she would have no other support, no pension or welfare. She would be all alone. Yet she comes along and gives everything to God. Absolutely everything. These two tiny leptons, worth next to nothing. As they fall into the collecting box you cannot hear the sound of them falling. Whereas the rich man puts in a large sum of coins. These makes an enormous racket as they fall into the box. The sort of clatter that makes people turn around to see what is happening. Yet it is just so much loose change. He has so much he will not even notice the money given away. It has cost him nothing.

For some years when I was teaching some of the students played a game they called 'Walley'. It consisted of throwing coins at the wall and seeing whose coin, usually a 1p or 2p,

ended closest to the wall. When the bell went to mark the end of break or lunchtime they just went into the building. There were days when I collected 40p or more, over £2 in the week which I gave to charity. The money was worthless to them and they quite literally threw it away for they had so much.

Fay Rowland reminds us all that everything we have comes from God. How much do we simply throw away. The news has told us how much food we waste as a nation. But what about our time, our money, our opportunities.

The widow gave everything. Where am I in this, rich as I am? Did not Jesus give up everything for me? Giving his life to set me free.

Now as a prayer, we will use the hymn All that I am as our prayer

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Here is another coin



What do you think of this one?

It is sizeable and made of silver and known as a tetradrachms or shekel. They were produced in the major city and trading port of Tyre from a hundred years before Jesus. They were made to show how wealthy and powerful was the city.

Now let us listen to a reading from the Bible featuring this coin.

Matthew 26.14-15

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve disciples—the one named Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, “What will you give me if I betray Jesus to you?” They counted out thirty silver coins and gave them to him.

A reflection

It is sobering to remember that when Jesus said that one of you will betray me the other 11 disciples did not knowingly all point to Judas. After all Judas was one of them, sharing their common life together, their adventures and stories. Along with them he had gone out and done amazing things. He was a trusted and valued friend and comrade. With them all he had agreed with Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah. He was one of them shouting Hosanna and laying his coat on the road. So why did he break ranks?

I have no doubt the money helped as he thought of making a secure future for himself. Yet he had decided to hand Jesus over before the cash came into the equation. Was it anger and disappointment with Jesus for having created such a stir on entering Jerusalem but now talking about death? Not taking over the city and making himself king but dying for it? Did he hope to become Jesus' right hand man in the new regime given the fact he was the group's treasurer? Had he some cherished plans for what would happen in this new kingdom? A pleasant little place back in Galilee? Yet throughout all of this there is Jesus so calm. He knew what lay ahead for him and now there is this betrayal.

Jesus goes to his death wounded by wounds common to all; Greed, lust, ambition. All the natural drives and desires of humanity that are turned in on themselves and not outward looking. How about me when I turn my back on Jesus because things haven't turned out the way I wanted? Inward looking, full of me, me, me.

When we say Jesus died 'because of our sins' we are not making some high flown, abstract declaration; we are saying what put Jesus on the cross was the sins we not only commit but wallow in. Only when we have grasped that can we begin to appreciate what it meant for Jesus to sit at that table and share the Passover meal with all of them, including Jesus. So often when faced with the utter love of God I return to this poem by George Herbert.

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, |observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked anything.

'A guest,' I answered, 'worthy to be here.'
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
 'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.'
Love took me by the hand, and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord, but I have marred them, let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' said Love, 'who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

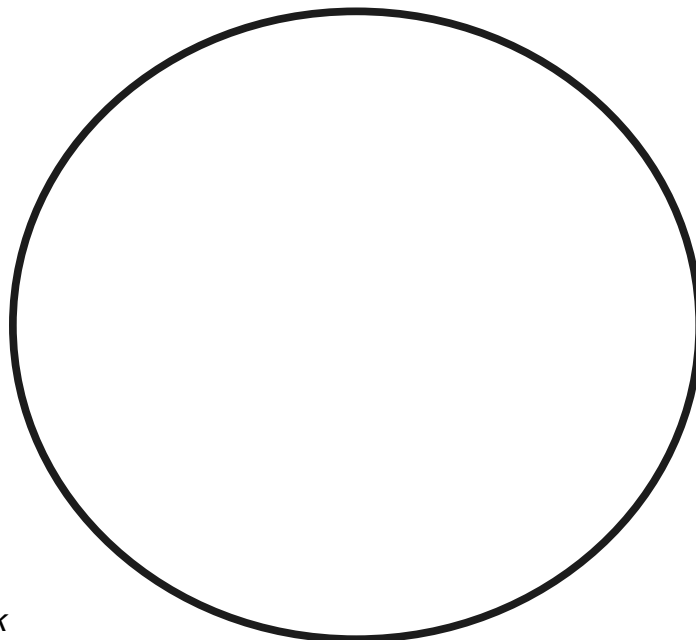
Let us say together this prayer of confession

**Lord Jesus, you come into our lives
when we are least prepared for you.
As you enfolded your betrayers,
so embrace us who struggle to love.
Reconcile us with our sisters and brothers,
and, for the sake of your love,
forgive us all our sins.**

Let us hear the words of Jesus;
Your sins are forgiven
Amen.

We sing the hymn : O God you search me – [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

Here is another coin.



It is intentionally blank

It is the coin of our life.

What image would we use?

What would the inscription be? I think we can use English don't you?

What would we want other people to know about us?

What matters to us?

A lot to get across in a very short space.

Would we, could we put down that we know Jesus as our Lord and **Saviour**?

If the answer is No we might want to use our time of prayer to invite Jesus to come into our lives. To be the king we know we need, the king of love.

So let us spend a time in silent prayer.

We could pray for ourselves, someone we know, some situation or event. Just remember God already knows what we want to pray and the words are not that important. It can be a thought or a cry, a smile or a tear.

(Names from our virtual prayer book)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

We sing the hymn: Tell out my soul – [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

Blessing

**May the Light of the world guide us,
the Life of the world refresh us,
and the Hope of the world be our companion,
that we may be the reconciling power of Christ in the world.**

**So may grace, mercy and peace be with us all
Amen.**