

## This week's Scripture - Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October - Proper 24A

**Isaiah 45.1-7; Psalm 96.1-9 (10-13); 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10; Matthew 22.15-22**

**Isaiah 45.1-7** - The prophet Isaiah speaks to Cyrus on behalf of God in today's reading. Cyrus was the king of Persia, who allowed the exiled Israelites to return home. Cyrus was called God's Anointed (Messiah), and God proclaimed that all barriers would be broken down for Cyrus by God, for the sake of Israel. Though Cyrus did not know God, God chose him, so that all people might know that God is the only God, the one who creates all things and brings light into being.

**Psalm 96** is a song of praise, calling the people to sing to God who is the one to be praised. God is the one who is the king of all nations, of all peoples, who made everything. The psalmist calls upon the people to sing to all nations that God is the true king. All of creation shall sing for joy, for God is coming to judge the world, with righteousness and truth.

**1 Thessalonians 1.1-10** - Paul began his introduction to the church in Thessalonica with an affirmation that God has chosen this church. Not only did they receive the word that Paul had brought to them, but the work of the Holy Spirit was manifest in them and the Thessalonians became an example to others in Macedonia and Achaia. These regions reported to Paul how the Thessalonians shared the Gospel by turning away from idols and worshiping only God, and waiting for Jesus to return.

**Matthew 22:15-22** - When the religious leaders tried to trick Jesus in, they asked him if it was lawful to pay taxes or not. They sent some of their leaders along with the Herodians, who were loyal to Herod and the ideal of a re-established kingdom of Israel. Though the religious leaders were not necessarily loyal to Rome, they also didn't want to stir up trouble with the Roman governor. Jesus called them hypocrites for putting him to the test, and asked them to show him a coin used to pay the tax and whose face was on the coin. When they responded that it was the emperor's face, Jesus answered simply to give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God what is God's, reminding them that God's reign was not of this world. They couldn't think of more questions after that and left him alone.

**Reflection:** How do we live faithfully when we are uncertain? In 2020, we're probably tired of the overused phrases "uncertain future" and "unprecedented times." But it's the truth: we live in these times, and our own certainty is questionable, our endurance lacking, our strength diminishing, our convictions lessening.

Some religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in this thinking, but he reminded them, and reminds us, that we live in God's kingdom, a reign that is not of this world, though we are participating in it now. In a time when the phrase "mutual aid" is popping up in our communities, we with our Christian radar ought to hone in and recognize that it's kingdom work at hand: loving our neighbours as ourselves. Though Caesar has betrayed us again and again, we give to God what is God's.

It may be October, but it might do us good to look towards Advent's theme of expectant hope and waiting. What's a little more waiting time, right now, when everything is up in the air? Hopefully, we are learning again how to live faithfully. Cyrus didn't know God, but saw God's goodness, mercy, righteousness, and graciousness before him. We see that at work, too, and that gives us hope.

## Praying with others...

### Call to Worship

O sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
Sing to the LORD, bless God's name;  
tell of God's salvation from day to day.  
Declare God's glory among the nations,  
God's marvelous works among all the peoples.  
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
God is to be revered above all.

### Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of All, we confess that we have made idols of wealth,  
notoriety, and other worldly measures of success.  
As these idols are crashing down around us, we are losing hope, losing joy, losing faith.  
But You are the God above all.  
You are the One who leads us into Your reign, a kingdom not of this world.  
You are the one who shows us how to truly live, by loving our neighbours as ourselves.  
Lead us into the true faith, O God, through Jesus Christ Your Son, who lived for us, who died for us,  
and lives again, teaching us to live into Your ways of love, justice, mercy, and peace.  
In these ways, we worship and live the true, abundant life You intended for us,  
now and into eternity. Amen and Amen.

### Assurance of Forgiveness

God's faithfulness endures forever.  
God's love never ends.  
God's grace and mercy are always present to you through Jesus Christ.  
Repent; turn back to God's ways, and know that forgiveness is there, right there, for you to claim.  
Love is in your heart, where it has always been.  
Mercy is at your grasp, ready for you to give it.  
Grace is in every moment, every breath you take.  
Live into God's ways, and know God's forgiveness, mercy, and love are with you, right now. Amen.

### Prayer

Peace, Peace, O God. We crave it, we desire it, we long for it to become our reality in our lifetime.  
But we know peace cannot come without justice. May Your justice delay no longer, O God.  
May we pursue justice on behalf of those who are oppressed, marginalized, and rejected.  
May we pursue justice in our daily lives, for peace must begin with ourselves as we seek justice.  
May we find Your peace even as we dismantle the painfulness of racism in our lives.  
May Your peace be made known to us in the face of oppression and evil.  
May Your peace prevail in our hearts, in our waking up and lying down, in every breath,  
for peace is in Your presence.  
Through Your peace, break open our hearts to Your love,  
for peace and love must go together, and love demands justice.  
In seeking peace in our daily lives, may we live into the path You have led us, a path of hope and  
reconciliation that begins with justice and love.  
May we do this, and live, knowing You are with us, now and always, Prince of Peace. Amen.