WHO'S IN CONTROL?

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

PART 3

‘Then Jesus said to them,
“Give back to Caesar
what is Caesar’s and to
God what is God’s.” And
they were amazed at
him.’

- Mark 12:17 -

MARK: WHO'S IN CONTROL?

In Chapters 11-14 of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' life seems to be spiralling out of control. He enters Jerusalem and goes straight to the temple. Over the ensuing days he begins teaching people about the Kingdom of God in a way that gets more controversial and dangerous day by day.

Jesus has already told us three times that he's going to die and rise again (Mark 8:31, 9:30-31, 10:33-34). While people want to trap him in his words, Jesus pulls no punches and questions the allegiances of the people around him. Is God in control of their lives or is it their stuff?

Jesus uses parables, conversations with people, as well as his physical surroundings, to teach about God and His Kingdom. In Chapter 12, he points out an old woman giving a small donation to the temple (the widow's mite), and uses this to expose how our money controls us and how God's generosity sets us free.

As Jesus reaches the end, he teaches the end. His words about the destruction of the temple and the signs of the end times are the ones that ultimately get him killed, but Jesus won't stop. He's the Messiah, a man on a mission, and while the world around him seems to be spinning out of control, Jesus is here to show us that God's ultimately in control.

As we approach Advent in our church calendar, and the 'silly season' in our social calendars, let's remember that God's in control. Let's take stock of our lives and repent of the sins that so easily entangles us and throw off everything that hinders us from living for God. Let's let Jesus remind us who's really in control.

God bless,

Rev'd David Browne
Dalby Anglican

Warming up:

Who's in control of your town/state/country? Who's in control of everything?

Read: Mark 12:13-17

1. In v.13, who sent the Pharisees and Herodians? Why are they trying to catch Jesus in his words? What is significant about the two groups working together?
2. What are they doing in v.14? Are they trying to flatter Jesus?
3. Why are they asking about paying tax to Caesar? What does it matter if people did or didn't pay tax back then?
4. How does Jesus respond? How does this undermine what the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to do?
5. Jesus says ‘give to God what is God's’. What does belong to God? Whose image is on us? (see Genesis 1:27)

Read: Mark 12:28-34

1. Why does a teacher of the law seem to be so impressed with Jesus? (see Mark 12:18-27)
2. Is this teacher trying to catch Jesus out? Why/why not?
3. What is the most important commandment? Why does Jesus suggest these two?
4. Why does Jesus respond the way he does in v.34? Why is everyone now afraid to ask him questions?

Rubber hits the road:

How can we ‘give to God what is God's’ in our own lives? How can we go about our lives seeking to fulfil the two great commandments?

NOTES / PRAYER POINTS / ETC.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you that you are in control. Thank you that you have power even over the powers of this world. Help us to see this and to live our lives in service to you, by giving to you the things that already belong to you. Help us therefore to love you with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Through Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

Warming up:

Have you ever observed someone do a generous act without expecting any recognition or reward? How did it make you feel?

Read: Mark 12:38-44

1. What behaviors does Jesus warn against in the religious leaders? Why do you think he emphasises these actions?
2. What might Jesus' criticism of the scribes reveal about the dangers of religious pride and hypocrisy?
3. Why do you think Jesus positioned himself to watch people give their offerings at the temple treasury?
4. What contrast is being drawn between the rich people and the poor widow?
5. Jesus calls his disciples over to see what the widow has done. Why do you think he wanted to make sure they noticed her offering?
6. Jesus says the widow gave "all she had to live on." What do think this reveals about the depth of her faith and trust in God?
7. How might the actions of the widow challenge our understanding of what it means to give generously?
8. What are the key lessons that Jesus wants his disciples (and us) to learn from this passage?

Rubber hits the road:

Reflect on your own giving, whether it's financial or through your time, talents or resources. How does this passage challenge you to consider the way you give? What might it look like for you to give in a way that reflects deep trust in God?

NOTES / PRAYER POINTS / ETC.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for showing us the example of the widow who gave generously and sacrificially. Help us to have hearts that are willing to give out of love, trust, and faithfulness, rather than out of obligation or pride. Teach us to be generous with our time, resources, and love, just as you have been generous to us. Amen.

Warming up:

Have you ever needed to defend your faith? What did you say? If not – what would you say if you did need to?

Read: Mark 13:1-11

1. What have the disciples just witnessed in the temple? How is this contrasted with what the disciples are impressed with in v.1?
2. What does Jesus' response reveal about things that matter?
3. In v.3, where is Jesus sitting? Why is this place significant? (see Zechariah 14:1-9, Mark 11:1-11, Mark 14:32-50, Acts 1:9-12)
4. In v.4, why might Peter, James, John and Andrew be asking Jesus the question privately?
5. What things does Jesus call "the beginning of birth pains"? (Vv.5-8)
6. Why do you think Jesus calls them "birth pains"?
7. Why does Jesus tell us not to be alarmed at these things?
8. In vv.9-11, Jesus moves on to talking about things that will happen to the disciples. What things do we need to watch out for?
9. Why is it important that Jesus warned us about these things?
10. Is chaos in control?

Rubber hits the road:

How would you summarise this passage to a friend who asks you about the end of the world? How do you remain alert but not fearful as you look to the future?

NOTES / PRAYER POINTS / ETC.

Prayer

Living God, you alone are eternal. Forgive us for those times that we are amazed by the things of this world, and neglect to praise and be amazed by you. In the midst of natural disasters, wars, persecution and heartache, please give us courage to look to you, find our rest in your presence and to be faithful in our discipleship. By your grace, strengthen us to stand firm and preach your good news wherever we may be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Warming up:

Name something kind that someone has done for you this week.

Read: Matthew 25:31-46

1. What happens in this story? Who is telling the story? What is the point?
2. What do vv.31-32 tell us about the setting of this story?
3. What do you know about sheep and goats? Why are they used in this story?
4. What happens to the sheep? What happens to the goats?
5. How do the sheep respond to the King? What does this tell us about them?
6. How do the goats respond to the King? What does this tell us about them?
7. What does this passage tell us about eternal punishment?
8. What does this passage tell us about eternal life?
9. What are some ways people might misunderstand this passage?
10. What does this passage mean for your friends and loved ones?

Rubber hits the road:

If eternal judgement is real (and Jesus speaks here knowing that it is), how should this change our priorities and habits in life? What parts of your life don't acknowledge this passage? What parts do?

NOTES / PRAYER POINTS / ETC.

Prayer

King of Kings and Lord of Lords, thank you that you are in control of our past, present, and future. Please forgive us for neglecting you as we have neglected the people around us. Holy Spirit, please help us to respect, welcome and care for those around us, as if they were Jesus himself. **Amen.**

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”’

- Mark 12:29–31 -

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