

**“Joining God’s Spirit active in our world” a sermon about a clause from the Knox Church Dunedin mission statement and based on the lectionary reading for the day from Matthew 22: 15 – 22, preached by Kerry Enright, minister at Knox Church Dunedin on 19 October 2014.**

If someone asked you to use faith terms to explain your daily activity, your everyday life, what might you say?

Day by day we live by routine. We wake, we dress, we eat, perhaps we work or study or read or volunteer or care for someone or connect with people or rest – we do something, and we eat some more, we sleep, and we start again, with variations.

Whatever is our routine – how might we explain it in faith terms?

We are helped that the one we follow keeps entering the routine. He keeps entering the everyday.

Today he holds up a coin, a token of everyday living – most likely there is a coin in our pockets now, or in our purse, or somewhere near at hand - we use these coins every day.

And the coin takes us places – it takes us to how we receive money – I get my coins because Knox Church pays me a stipend to be minister here. We get coins from the work we do, the work we have done, the taxes we have paid, how we have invested our lives.

The coin takes us further – to how we spend. Our coin is part of a system of exchange by which we contribute to the wellbeing of others – our voluntary effort, study, research, painting, transporting, parenting, homebuilding or farming.

Humankind has established patterns for how we are rewarded, how we contribute to each other’s good, how our effort is rewarded.

The coin is a token of economy.

So Jesus holds up a coin and he enters into the everyday, and he asks what our activity is for, who we are serving.

The Christian faith sees money from the perspective of those who do not have it. It sees power from the perspective of those without it. What does economy, power, influence, place, what does our activity, feel like, or look like from the perspective of those at the edge? What does it look like for people whose voices are not heard – including creation itself? What are the silent ones trying to say? What are they trying to help us see? What do they want us to hear?

Stand over there, move over there, and see what the coin – the everyday, the activity, the economy – what it feels like over there. You can see it expressed in our bulletin cover.

The point is not just to watch or observe or judge. The purpose is to bring people from the edge to the centre, from the margins to the middle, from exclusion to inclusion, to participate in society, to be valued as people, for the people and earth to flourish.

The Christian life is about changing the world, step by step, conversation by conversation, engagement by engagement, action by action, loving act by loving act, transforming the world, until it reflects God’s vision for the world.

It's a tussle, a struggle, a conflict, a fight, a war even.

It doesn't just happen – it is a change of systems, of ways of seeing, of powers and rulers.

We are exchanging one ruler for another, one emperor for another, one king for another, one nation for another.

The tussle is so cataclysmic that it leads to crucifixion.

The emperor is so determined to hold on to power, the power that privileges some and disadvantages others, that rewards some and excludes others, that maintains the structures and systems of this world so some stay in power, that the empire murders the one who dares overturn it for God's realm.

The threat to privilege, to power, to economy is so significant that death is the only way to end it.

The resurrection says that death is not the end. Where the king of this world thought he had ended the threat, had closed down the movement, God invests Jesus with the power of the way, God fills Jesus with the spirit of the vision, God invests Jesus with the authority of God's realm, and in resurrection God raises Jesus, the embodiment of the way, God's raises Jesus to life, with new power, new influence, new impetus. The revolution of God we call resurrection releases new energy for flourishing into the world.

The struggle needs to happen in us.

The power of this world has such a hold on us, such power over us, such grasp of our hearts, such influence in our minds - we are so held in its sway, that we must die to ourselves – crucifixion is the only way into the new way of being.

The power that holds us needs defeating. The thoughts that fill our minds need cleansing. The spirits that drive us need exorcising.

And in dying, we are drawn into the rising life. We are taken up into it. As we die to the emperor, we are raised, lifted up, lifted into, drawn into God's empire. So that our minds, our wills, our imagining, our whole lives are for God's way in the world.

So when we hold the coin in our hand, the question is – who rules you? Who has power over you? To whom do you listen? To whom do you give attention? To whom are you giving your heart? Who has sway in your life? What kind of kingdom are you serving? What kind of economy do you support? What vision are you living towards? Who rules you? Who really, really, really, in your heart, who inspires you?

The Herodians thought they could serve God and Herod. They so valued the existing systems and rulers, they thought change could happen progressively, gradually, collaboratively, by paying taxes to Herod, by serving the present system, by protecting the existing way.

The Pharisees also supported paying the tax, and they marked out a religious realm for themselves. So you honour the emperor and are religious at the same time. You worship the god of this world

and you are moral in some aspects of your life at the same time. As long as you are moral and religious, just get on with life.

When he holds up the coin though, Jesus takes us much deeper than a question of political vision. It is a question of rulership, of discernment, of sensing that life is not just a matter of getting on and getting through, but of how we participate in overturning the world for the excluded and unheard.

That is what God is doing in our world. That is who God is, the one who overturns Herod and establishes the way of Jesus Christ. That is what the Spirit is for, to bring that world to reality today, to give that way effect today.

So how do we understand what we do day by day?

Our faith says that God's Spirit is at work in our world, that the way of Jesus Christ is being established in this world, that the power that excludes and destroys and marginalises has been defeated through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and that the world is affected by the power of resurrection, raising people up, establishing God's reign and rule, and that our daily lives are part of that dynamic.

Our study, our driving, our volunteering, our serving, our parenting, our working, our homebuilding, our economy, are to serve the way of Jesus Christ, who is active in our world. And we are called to discern his presence, to look and listen and notice his presence, to seek it out, to discover how Christ is active, to attend to him, in the power of the Spirit, day by day by day.

The purpose of our day by day lives is to join God's Spirit active in the world.

We are the coin, stamped with the image of God, tokens of God's world in the everyday.

**Prayer of Praise and Confession**

Is it easier to praise you here, great God, in a city of peace, a roof over head, heaters softening the cold, the sound of birds, natural beauty everpresent, unscarred by war. Our worship is not interrupted by gunfire. Exploding bombs do not deafen us. Our children are not killed by missiles.

How quickly our ears become blocked, our hearts become closed, our eyes become inured to what is beyond our immediate experience, our lives become self-referencing.

We see you holding the dying child in a bombed out shelter, weeping, pleading, praying for life. Praise to you, Jesus Christ.

We see you stretching your love to the most fragile and the most angry, longing for life. Praise to you parent God.

We see you breathing peace, inspiring hope, sustaining service, inciting life. Praise to you Spirit of God.

Come among us again, opening our hearts, enlivening our spirits to live the way of Jesus Christ, through whom we pray.