**Notes for Next Sunday**

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 45:1-7

**“This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ﻿2﻿ I will go before you and will level the mountains, I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. ﻿3﻿ I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. ﻿4﻿ For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. ﻿5﻿ I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, ﻿6﻿ so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. ﻿7﻿ I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.**

The setting here is of Judah in Babylonian captivity. The question could be asked: “Who is in charge here?” The answer would most assuredly be “The Lord.” For the comfort of the Israelites, us and for all times God is always in charge.

The Lord makes (anoints) Cyrus His instrument to accomplish His purpose. Cyrus was the Founder of the Persian Empire. In 538 BC he captured Babylon and issued a decree (v. 1 “open doors…gates will not be shut) allowing the captive Hebrews to go back to their native land.

It is as though the Lord Himself personally took a hand in the issues involved, came down from heaven, led the way for Cyrus and cleared away the obstacles that towered in his path (v. 2).

A further item of God’s guiding of the destinies of this servant of His is that He allows the conqueror to amass rich treasures (v. 3). These would have been kept for safe-keeping in dark, sometimes subterranean, chambers, or may be buried in secret places. This was like the Fort Knox of old. The treasures amassed by Babylon must have been fabulous.

There are three reasons for Cyrus’ success. They are:

1. “so that you man know that I am the Lord (v. 3). Cyrus did not know God as his own God and Savior. He did, however, come to understand that the Lord God of Israel was responsible for his success.
2. “For the sake of Jacob my servant (v. 4). God is faithful even when Israel or we are faithless.
3. “so…men may know there is no besides me” (v. 6). This plays into the verses using “I am” (vv. 5, 6) which is how God identifies Himself to Moses.

In verse 7 we see that the Lord is always in charge. We may be puzzled by His dealings in our world and in our own lives, but whether He brings prosperity or creates disaster, He always has the best interests of His people in mind. So He promised, “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28).

GOSPEL – Matthew 22:15-22

**15﻿ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ﻿16﻿ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ﻿17﻿ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” ﻿18﻿ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ﻿19﻿ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ﻿20﻿ and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” ﻿21﻿ “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” ﻿22﻿ When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.**

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to fulfill his mission, right on God’s time. He does this as the spotless Lamb of God. Matthew relays a succession of three interrogations of Jesus by the Pharisees and Sadducees trying to find some fault in him. None was found. Through these three examinations, Matthew shows that Jesus is the spotless Lamb, now examined and ready (Ex 12:3–6) for the sacrifice on behalf of all.

The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule, while the hated Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisees enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in His words. After trying to put Him off guard with flattery, they sprang their question: “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (v. 17). If He said “No,” the Herodians would report him to the Roman governor and He would be executed for treason. If he said “Yes,” the Pharisees would denounce Him to the people as disloyal to His nation.

The Pharisees would not come themselves, but would send a group of their keenest students who this time might be expected to come before Jesus without arousing in Him a suspicion of sinister motives on their part. The impression which they evidentially designed to make was that a dispute had occurred between them and they now desired to settle it by referring the matter to an authority such as Jesus was. We must always remember that the devil is a liar and the father of lies.

In verse 21 Jesus distinguishes the two realms—the civil and the heavenly—under which all believers live. Though our first allegiance is always to God (Ac 5:29), we are also bound to obey the legitimate civil authorities God has established (Rm 13:1–7). Luther: “It is the duty and obligation of those who participate in this earthly regime to administer law and punishment, to maintain the distinctions that exist among ranks and persons, to manage and distribute property.… But the Gospel does not trouble itself with these matters. It teaches about the right relation of the heart to God” (AE 21:108). (TLSB)

This is on this Tuesday of Holy Week. On this day Jesus tells the Pharisees to pay taxes to Caesar, and on Friday they haul Him before Pilate and say, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2).