Sermon: October 18, 2026
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Love God with your Mind

Yesterday thousands of people across this country participated in a civic protest against policies that have been adopted by our federal government. The focus of yesterday's protest was to affirm the right to vote without intimidation, threats, or violence.

The part I like about the rallies or demonstrations are the people who carry signs that provoke well placed humor such as, "you know things are messed up when librarians start marching". Or, "Think while it is still legal". There are signs of thoughtful consideration; "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds". At a rally, I saw was a Hispanic woman, draped in a Mexican flag holding a sign, "If it is true that if all lives matter, does my life still matter?"

In times of political partisanship, , Christians revisit the discussion; how should we respond when authorities break norms and laws? What is the role of the government? What can we learn from the today's gospel about confronting wrongdoing.

By this time Jesus had a lot of practice. Jesus was the ultimate master of handling a bad question and turning it into a profound truth that stunned his audience.

When Jesus asked for a denarius and inquired whose image was stamped on it, they replied, "Caesar's." His famous response followed: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Jesus recognizes that earthly governments have a proper, limited realm of authority. When we pay taxes, we acknowledge government jurisdiction to maintain roads, fund our police, and our schools, to name some examples

The New Testament passage read today is thought to be the first time that Jesus makes a case for the separation of church and state, which is a foundational doctrine of this country. It was Thomas Jefferson who coined

the phrase “wall of separation” to ensure the federal government could not establish a national religion or interfere with the free exercise of faith.

God allows for civil authority to exist.

This distinction echoes throughout scripture.

In the Old Testament after the Israelites were released by Egypt, Israel consisted of 12 tribes, named after the 12 sons of Jacob.

They established a decentralized government, sort of confederation that was ruled by Judges, elders, priests, and other local leaders who provided spiritual and military guidance. Most prominent Judges were Deborah, Gideon and Samson. But it was the priest Samuel who had to negotiate the demand of the 12 tribes to give them a king so that they could be as the other nations. And the Lord told Samuel in first Samuel 8, “Warn them solemnly and let them know what the king will claim as his rights. The day will come when the people cry out for relief from the king they have chosen, but the Lord will not answer them in that day.”

God installed Saul as King, followed by David and Solomon. In time, the kingdoms splitl and for the next 900 years, the Jewish people fell under the rule of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, and the Romans. It is under Roman rule that Jesus is asked if it is right to pay taxes to Caesar.

Today’s gospel illustrates how Jesus was a master at formulating questions. QBQ – is a short book by John Miller. QBQ stands for the Question Behind the Question – QBQ. The book addresses how complaining, procrastinating, and blaming others stem from asking poor questions. It focuses on people taking personal accountability and forward action to bring about change for the better.

In this gospel, Jesus saw the question behind the question - QBQ

Two Jewish groups—the Pharisees, who opposed Roman rule, and the Herodians, who sympathized with Rome—joined forces to corner Jesus.

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? He saw the QBQ – the question behind the question.

Jesus knew that if said “Yes,” the Pharisees could call Him a collaborator with the Roman oppressor, taking sides against His own people.

If Jesus said “No,” the Herodians could call Him a dangerous rebel who was threatening the wrath of Rome on the community.

But Jesus managed to thread the needle so His words couldn’t be used against Him. Jesus completely reframed the premise of their question and deliver a flawless answer.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

God’s kingdom doesn’t thrive when co-opted into great human empires, as God warned Samuel. God’s kingdom does not derive its power from military or political entities. Jesus reaffirmed that church and state operate in distinct spheres.

While we value separation of church and state, it does not mean that we remain quiet when it comes to matters of justice, fairness, and the humane treatment of people. Throughout the Bible are examples of people who confronted ruling powers on matters of moral principle. Jesus would want us to do the same.

After King David abused his military and political authority to commit adultery with Bathsheba and arrange the murder of her husband, Nathan, prophet and trusted advisor, confronted David about his crimes.

In one of the starkest examples of religious resistance against state tyranny, the prophet Elijah confront King Ahab & Queen Jezebel about the pagan cult of Baal, corruption, and the execution political dissidents.

In the gospels, Jesus
frequently targeted the local and religious leaders who collaborated with Rome to exploit the people:

- **He Condemned Hypocrisy and Greed calling** out the ruling elites a "brood of vipers" and "evil cheaters". Jesus flipped the tables in the temple because money changers and animal seller were exploiting worshiper for profit.

Are we asking the right questions?

Andre Crouch was a popular Christian singer in the 1970's who known for the song "Jesus is the Answer, for the World today". And before long, bumper stickers appeared with the words, "Jesus is the Answer". It was soon followed by a witty counter-slogan, "if Jesus is the answer, what was the question?"

A few years later, the "I Found It!" campaign hit the billboards and airwaves. Because the slogan left "it" intentionally vague, it quickly inspired pop-culture parodies like "I Lost It" or "I Smoked It" bumper stickers. Two weeks later, follow-up ads and tracts revealed "it" to mean "new life in Jesus Christ".

While the intentions were good, slogans don't necessarily invite meaningful conversation.

WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? This is one I like. It runs through my head when faced with a dilemma. Of course it didn't escape parodies like this classic one-liner: "I found some money on the pavement and thought, 'What would Jesus do?', so I turned it into wine". What would Jesus do? Jesus would ask more questions.

Jesus used questions teach, rather than dispensing direct answers. Across the Gospels, Jesus asked over 300 questions while directly answering only a small fraction of the183 questions posed to Him.

Jesus uses a mix of parables, questions, object lessons and scripture to communicate spiritual truths.

What would Jesus do when confronted with the form of communication we rely on. Anyone, I repeat anyone, can send a text, create a video or a website, share stories without a grain of truth.

MIT Study False news takes an average of 10 hours to reach 1,500 people on Twitter, compared to about 60 hours for true stories. False information is 70% more likely to be retweeted than truthful information.

Would Jesus start a podcast, or head to the airwave to buy commercials during the world series?

Former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill house speaker popularized the phrase **"all politics is local"** meaning that voters and constituents care most about immediate, everyday issues that affect their personal lives, homes, and communities rather than abstract national debates.

We have the opportunity to participate and give input to our communities, which are in effect, small governments. We can use our intellect to develop thoughtful questions, identify issues, and suggest solutions in a thoughtful and compelling way.

We can attend city councils or school board meetings and use the 2 minutes of time allowed for public comment to bring to attention to issues that concern us, such safe sidewalks, speed limits, underfunded after school programs. Local government appoints commissions and citizen advisory committees for tourism, downtown parking and architectural review. These are volunteers willing to work on issues to improve the quality of life in our communities, to address issues of safety, mental health, and well-being.

To be like Jesus, ask more questions. Stretch your mind. It is said if you want better answers and outcomes, ask better questions. You may be thinking, oh, I'm not that smart. I am not an intellectual. Albert Einstein said, "it's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer".

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37).

Love God with your mind.

Just as the coin belongs to Caesar because it has his face on it, you belong to God because you are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Caesar can have your tax money, but God demands your heart, your soul, and your mind.

Use it for good.