



# Poland Presbyterian Church

*At the Green since 1802*

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**October 19, 2014**  
**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Committment Sunday**

Matthew 22:15-22

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

## **“To Whom Do We Belong?”**

In today's gospel story Jesus is drawn into what we might call a lose/lose situation. It didn't seem that there was any answer in this situation that Jesus could give that wouldn't get him into trouble with someone. And yet, Jesus comes out of it looking like a hero. Don't you wish you were able to do that? I certainly wish I could.

Jesus turns the whole question upside down and points the people in a new direction. This question is not about paying taxes, but about belonging. The real question here is “To Whom Do You Belong” As Roman citizens or subjects they thought they belonged to the emperor. Jesus in effect is asking the people if Caesar is really the one to whom they belong.

What is the message on our own coins today? They say, “In God we Trust” and “Liberty” which are statements about our own highest aspirations. The image of Caesar was one that represented not true liberty, but oppression. No wonder the people were loathe to pay their taxes. We pay our taxes, not only because we don't really have a choice, but because we are committed to the values represented on the face of our coins. We believe that our taxes will go to further those values as part of our identity as Americans. That image on our coin says something about who we are. It gives us our national identity.

Jesus asks the people what it is that bears God's image? Because whatever bears God's image belongs to God. We have been created in the image of God and it is that image that tells us who we are and to what we are committed.

It is difficult to name something that you would commit your all to. And yet we all seem to have a desire to make a commitment. We will commit to the deepest desires of our hearts. Look at young couples about to embark upon marriage. It doesn't matter that they may have lived together for several years. At some point they have a burning desire to publically proclaim that they have made a lifelong commitment to one another.

Anything that is worth committing to requires effort on our part. Take planting a garden. It is exhilarating to work up the soil in the spring and plant each small seed, imagining how it will bring forth fruit. But after the planting it has to be weeded and watered and cared for. It takes commitment to go outside in the heat of a July afternoon

and still be willing to care for your little plant.

Kids love to go to pet stores and beg parents to bring home a sweet puppy or kitten. But what happens after you get home? Someone has to feed and train and walk that pet. This is usually the first experience most of us have with understanding what commitment really means. This animal will die without a whole hearted commitment.

It is the nature of all of us to make commitments even though we have difficulty seeing them through. One of the most compelling traits we seem to find in others is when they do what they say they are going to do, when they follow through on commitment. People who do their very best at whatever job they do are usually good at it because they are completely committed to what they are doing. Without that full commitment whatever we do seems to fall flat. It appears that we really just don't care.

Our church is moving in wonderful new directions, but it takes everyone's commitment to keep that momentum. If you are a deacon or an elder, take your responsibilities seriously. If you serve on a committee show up and pitch in. If you care about missions, volunteer to do your part. Show up – that's 90% of your commitment right there. And give as you are able.

We bear the image of God and that means that we belong to God. Belonging to God is about the best news we could ever hear. Who wants to belong to Caesar or to the culture of consumerism and commercialism that is so intent on obtaining the commitment of our time, talent, and treasure? If we buy into that as our identity we will commit everything we are and have to a worthless cause. Where and on what we spend the precious hours allotted to us in our lives, our hard earned dollars, and our God-given talents shows us vividly to whom we belong and to what we are committed.

The ultimate commitment is the answer we give to the question - "What is it that is so important that you would die for?" In our reading from Philippians Paul knows that there is a good chance that he will be executed for his belief in Jesus. But that does not deter his commitment. There are places around our world today where Christians are still persecuted for their religious beliefs. I often ask myself if I were put to the test if I would be able to give my life for my commitment to Jesus.

One Sunday morning in South America, in a small chapel near the border between Venezuela and Colombia a priest was saying mass with a small congregation. Suddenly a band of guerilla soldiers broke through the door and they grabbed the priest and took him outside to be executed. Then the leader came back and shouted, "Anyone who believes in God, come forward!" Everyone was terrified and stood silent. One man, however, came forward and said, "I believe in Jesus." He, too, was taken away. One by one, several members of the congregation came forward to commit their lives to Christ by affirming their love of God. They were all taken outside. The ones remaining inside heard rapid machine gun fire.

Then the guerilla leader came back inside and told those remaining to get out. "You have no right to be here," he said to them. As they left the chapel they were astounded to see their priest and fellow Christians standing there alive. Then the guerilla leader ordered the priest and Christians back inside to continue the service while

warning the others, “Stay out until you have the courage to stand up for your beliefs. You don't deserve to worship here.” Then the guerillas disappeared into the jungle.<sup>i</sup>

That is the difference between commitment and lack of commitment. The priest and those few members of his congregation knew that in life or in death, they belonged to their loving God. And they were willing to do whatever was asked of them to follow through on that commitment.

In light of stories like this it seems so little that we are asked to give: our time, talent and treasure. Because we belong to God, we know that it is a commitment that we make because we desire to give all that we are and all that we have been given back to God because belonging to God is the most we could ever ask in this life. Amen.

<sup>i</sup> William J. Bausch, “A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers”, Mystic, CT, Twenty Third Publications, 2003, pg. 271-272.

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