

THE THREAD

*When Jesus made his "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem on that Sunday nearly 2,000 years ago, it was he who set a tone of confrontation with the secular and religious authorities. Jesus's symbolic procession through the east gate of the city was openly mocking Pilate's annual processional arrival through the west gate. Pilate entered on a gilt litter carried by slaves; Jesus entered on a humble ass. Pilate was surrounded by war horses, chariots and soldiers; Jesus was surrounded by peasants. Pilate symbolically embodied the might of the empire; Jesus symbolically embodied the salvific imagination of God. Pilate's power was the ability to crush resistance and to kill; Jesus's power was/is the ability to inspire hope and to create life.*

*On Monday Jesus continued to set a tone of confrontation, symbolically destroying the temple by overturning the tables.*

*The thread is Confrontation: it is woven through Holy Week, powerfully enacted in Sunday's entry to Jerusalem and Monday's symbolic destruction of the temple, and it continues today, Tuesday, as the authorities await his arrival at the temple.*

## LESSON Mark 11:27-33

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him<sup>28</sup> and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?'<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.'<sup>30</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.'<sup>31</sup> They argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?"'<sup>32</sup> But shall we say, "Of human origin"?'—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet.<sup>33</sup> So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

THE WARP

*By what authority does Jesus act? Who is the author of the author-ity?*

*The thread of confrontation that Jesus is deliberately weaving is beginning to find its warp and weft as the tapestry image takes shape. The warp is the question of Authority. The recognized authorities are the chief priests, the elders and the scribes. Who is the author of their authority? First, authority is given to them by Rome so long as they collaborate by keeping the emperor happy with large annual monetary tributes and a subdued population. The second author of their authority is societal: because they hold the titles of "priests" and "elders" people grant them power by dint of their office. In other words their authority is given, by Rome and the people; their authority is not earned by they themselves. Jesus's authority, however, is granted by no one. He holds no title and no office and no official authorization. Thus the question of authority is doubly dangerous for the titled elite because they cannot afford to lose authority from either Rome or the people. So they seek to discredit Jesus' authority in front of Rome and the people.*

*Jesus turns their question of authority back on them, forcing them to answer a question that challenges their own authority. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of*

*human origin? The "authorities" are now on the defensive. No matter how they answer they lose and their authority is diminished: say he was of heaven and they are hypocrites; say his baptism was human and risk turning the crowd against them and their unearned authority. The authorities' trap becomes a counter trap, and the question of Authority—secular and divine, is at the top of everyone's mind.*

LESSON Mark 12:1-12

Then he began to speak to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” But those tenants said to one another, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes”?’

When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

THE WEFT

*Talk about confrontation! Jesus is as blunt as could be here. The vineyard is Israel, both the people and the land. The vineyard is the ground of the sacred covenant made with Moses at Sinai. The vineyard is God's promise that through these people all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves. The vineyard is the divine wish for the restoration of the earth. If Confrontation is the thread, and Author-ity is the warp, the divine Promise to heal creation is the weft.*

*The tenants of this vineyard are the "authorities"—the chief priests, the elders, the scribes—they are the ones who embody the contextual Pharaoh and Egypt of that time. And note the irony: Israel was created to be a world vision for freedom from oppression from the Egypts of the world. The authorities—the tenants, the titled guardians of that world vision—had become the new Egypt and had morphed into the very structure of oppression that their religion was originally created to defy. Religion had become an excuse and justification of those in power.*

*This is not only an issue for them, then; this is not only about Moses and Pharaoh, chief priests and Jesus. It is about us, now. The Christian Church historically has struggled between its participation in the world's values and God's vision for creation. In the Youth Choir piece that follows, we have an example of Christian proclamation laden with visions very un-Christ-like. This anthem, straight from our music library highlights the co-opting struggle we face and how we, with all good intentions, attempt to reshape God's vision to reflect more comfortable worldly ways and worldly powers and call it divine. Yet listen for the last part of the anthem wherein Jesus finds a new way, a different response.*

## YOUTH CHOIR ANTHEM: Christian, Dost Thou See Them?

## LESSON Mark: 12:13-17

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. <sup>14</sup>And they came and said to him, ‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? <sup>15</sup>Should we pay them, or should we not?’ But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, ‘Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.’ <sup>16</sup>And they brought one. Then he said to them, ‘Whose head is this, and whose title?’ They answered, ‘The emperor’s.’ <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, ‘Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were utterly amazed at him.

THE TAPESTRY

*Confrontation is the thread. Authority is warp. The Promise of the healing of creation is the weft. We now come to the emerging picture of the tapestry itself—the Image of God's restored creation and the image of our own selves that we are weaving into the tapestry. And the image we are talking about here is not the one we claim to weave, but the one our behavior reveals: the image we actually live.*

*The Pharisees, the ultimate law followers, ask what is lawful. The question of what is lawful is double edged. Is this God's law or Rome's? Do we support God's vision of the world, or Rome's? Is it lawful to pay vision to Caesar or not? The trap is beautifully laid. And Jesus walks right in an springs it, snaring not himself, but the snare makers. "Bring me a denarius," Jesus says. They hand him one, and in doing so they spring their own trap. So strong is the Jewish prohibition against graven images that they had their own monetary system alongside Rome's. Jews' coins had no images and no inscriptions and faithful Jews used these. By handing Jesus a denarius, a coin with Caesar's image and the idolatrous inscription that named him the Son of God, they showed that the true image that they were actually weaving was not the one they claimed to believe, but the one their behavior revealed, the one they actually lived.*

*God's vision for creation and God's resultant action in history, what we in seminary call "salvation history," is seen in the call of Abraham, in the formation of Israel, in the Law of Moses, in the witness of the prophets and in the ministry of Jesus. God's progressive vision is the emerging tapestry—in the growing image of God's imaginative work in history to restore wholeness to the earth, to create a common-wealth of justice and mercy. That image continues to take shape as we ourselves weave not just our belief, but our behavior, into and onto that tableau. Whose image is on the coin we hold dear? Whose image do we weave into the tapestry?*

## LESSON Mark 12:18-27

Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her.’

Jesus said to them, ‘Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? <sup>5</sup>For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.’

THE WEAVER

*How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? How many ways can we find to talk about religion and not actually practice it?*

*The Sadducees, the final party representing those who collaborated with Rome, represent organized religion at its most tedious and irrelevant and banal. Take the energy and the focus and the time that could be spent doing works of justice, healing the sick, ministering to the downtrodden, and spend it instead on pointless mind games misdirected piety.*

*The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Isaiah, Amos and Micah, the God of Mary, Jesus and Paul, the God of Francis of Assisi and Theresa of Calcutta, the God of Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King and Edith Cavell is not a God who asks us to participate in drivel. This God is of the living, of those who cry for ministry now, of those who work in compassion now, of you and I and our faithful commitment to the finest this church can offer, now. This God is the Weaver—the Weaver of hope and challenge and discipleship and grace, the Weaver of prophesy and parable and sacred story, the Weaver of the dream of Eden, the promise of harmony, the image of relationships restored. The Weaver is the Author of the Promise, the Image and even of Confrontation that it takes to get there. And the Weaver invites us into the tapestry. The weaver asks us to consider what our portion of this ongoing tapestry will look like. After all, our corner of the tapestry will look exactly like we do, exactly like us.*