

Sermon: The LORD said to my Lord

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, October 25, 2026)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Back when I was just a wide-eye young man, looking to reconnect with my faith in Christ, after a prolonged period of absence from the Church. I had this rather odd, yet interesting conversation with my pastor in Montreal. He was recounting his ordeal of being flagged down by a cop for speeding on a highway. As he was waiting for the cop to walk up to his side window, a thought occurred to him. He decided to put on his ministerial collar—you know the thin, white strip one can easily take off and put on. When the cop saw that he had stopped a clergy, he politely gave the pastor a warning, to slow down, then waved him off.

The way my pastor described the event was rather illuminating—he was delighted to enjoy a bit of privilege in what he described as a Christian nation, meaning Canada. I supposed for a Presbyterian minister from Taiwan, pastoring an immigrant congregation in Montreal back in the 1990's, I could understand his point of view.

In spite of the Quiet Revolution in the Province of Quebec, which started in the 60's, which saw the populace gradually rejecting the teachings of the Catholic Church, Montreal was still 'Christian' enough, showing some semblance of deference to members of the cloth. Being let off on a speeding ticket from a God fearing cop was still possible back then. I am not so sure about now, some thirty years later, with not just Quebec but Canada as the whole, becoming increasingly secular. I am not so sure if I am ever stopped on the road for speeding, I could get away with putting on my collar, and expecting to find a sympathetic police officer, letting me off with a warning and a smile. As a matter of fact, I expect the opposite, knowing the so-called privilege of the clergy is really just a figment of memory of a long-gone past.

Theologians actually has a term for what I am describing; they call it the demise of the Christendom—short for the Christian kingdom—where the the position of the Church is increasingly being displaced, being moved from the centre to the margin, where its power is diminishing, its influence fading. It is a phenomenon that is acutely taking place in much of the Western countries in Europe, Canada and even the United States. This demise, some even call it the death of Christendom has long being debated amongst contemporary theologians, not about its actuality but about its desirability. We know that it is happening, but some have argued that such a loss of privilege is not to be

lamented but embraced, as it takes the Church back to where it was in 1st century. Back to the time when faith in Jesus was not so much an organized religion, but an emerging movement, a way of life, the Way of Life. As Jesus proclaims boldly and most assuredly, *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)

The demise of the Christendom while accepted by some, lamented by others, is vigorously resisted by a certain quarter, giving rise to an emerging Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism is characterized by the belief that one’s nation was found as a Christian nation, as willed and ordained by God. Therefore, the nation’s laws and structures must be guided by “Christian” beliefs and values lest the nation come to ruin. Such ideology teaches that Christians must seek control or influence over all means by which power operates in a society, including the government.

Nostalgia of the past certainly plays a role, but this current iteration of Christian nationalism is much more militant, much more willing to devalue anyone who is not Christian—or not ‘Christian enough’—in the eyes of its most ardent adherents. Such ideology routinely demonizes people or institutions that do not align with its core values, yet the values it professes often fail to align with the teachings of Christ such as love of God and neighbour or Jesus’ own teachings in the beatitudes.

Interestingly enough, Jesus also had to deal with a different yet not so dissimilar religious nationalism, in the first century Judaism. We see hints of it in our Scripture reading this morning, in the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. In this later part of Matthew 22, after Jesus had endured questions about paying taxes to Caesar, after he was questioned by the Sadducees about resurrection, and after Jesus had bested all his previous inquisitors, an expert in the law asked him a question, about the Law, *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”*

Now that is an interesting question as there are many ways that Jesus could’ve gone. He could’ve have simply listed the Ten Commandments, the universally acknowledged set of the most important Law, as handed down by God personally to Moses, inscribed on two stone tablets, kept supposedly in the Ark of the Covenant, stored securely in the Temple of Jerusalem, in the Holiest of the Holy. That would’ve been a very acceptable answer.

Alternatively, he could’ve cited Micah 6:8, a convenient summary, my personal favourite, linking the moral and ethical obligations of what the Lord God requires of us, that is *“to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God”*.

But instead, Jesus cited the second part of the Shema. ‘Shema’ in the Hebrew language means to hear, to listen and to respond through active

obedience rather than passive hearing. It is the opening word of Deuteronomy 6:4: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*" It is then followed by the command to love: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*"

This combination is central to Judaism's declaration of faith, centring on the absolute oneness of God and a total devotion of loving God.

How does one love God, with the whole heart, soul and might? The traditional answer is to obey God's commands, in its entirety. To teach such obedience to one's children in all settings, to display one's obedience proudly in one's home, on one's body, wherever you go, wherever you are. Ok, so I guess I kind of understand where Jesus is coming from, and what he is trying to say, even if it is really hard to do. It's the second part of this greatest commandment that puzzles me.

He went on on a tangent and cited an obscured rule in Leviticus 19:18 "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*" I call it obscured as that entire chapter is a collection of various rules and regulations that do not seem to follow any kind of pattern, just a bunch of them all thrown together. I supposed the point Jesus is making is stressing in importance of love: love God and love others, as the two sides of the one coin. One cannot claim to have loved God when one hates one's neighbours. And the reverse is true also, loving one's neighbours is akin to loving oneself which flows out of our love of God. On these two commandments hang all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets.

But Jesus did not end there. After enduring and responding to all these tests, all these questions from his various adversaries, Jesus went on the offensive, by posing to them, "*What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?*" It's a simple question with a simple answer, which is known to everyone: "*The son of David*", they replied.

David was the king with whom the Lord God entered into an everlasting covenant, promising that the decedent of David will always sit on the throne of his house, his dynasty. This seemingly unconditional, one-sided, everlasting covenant must be tempered with the real and historical Israel, and how prophets of the Lord were sent repeatedly to warn kings and people not to stray from the righteous path, lest their nation be destroyed by God.

And years after that destruction, exile, return, and re-occupation, the Jewish people hang their hope on a 'messianic' figure, a descendant of David, who will restore the nation to its former glory, just like in the time of David. To such hope, Jesus went on to dash it with yet another obscured reference, this time to Psalm 110:1, a psalm composed by David, "*The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'*"

‘The LORD’ refers to Yahweh, the proper name of the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. ‘My Lord’ refers to the Messiah, the supposedly descendant of David, yet David called him my Lord. The question Jesus posed is such: how could this descendant be the son of David, when David himself calls him ‘the Lord’. The point Jesus is making is that of allegiance—who owes allegiance to whom. In the case of Psalm 110, it is clear that David’s allegiance is to the Messiah, son of David by birth, but the Son of God by right.

The confusion lies not with David, but with all those who hopes for the restoration of the Jewish nation in the model of the Kingdom of Israel. They had forgotten to place their allegiance, their trust in the Lord God first and foremost, and in the Son whom God sends. In their quest for power and glory, they once again strayed from the path of faith, of simply loving God and loving neighbours as themselves.

As Jesus called out that particular brand of Jewish nationalism, so too should we call out Christian nationalism of our days. I would invite you to read the recent statement published by the Presbyterian Church in Canada on this issue. You can find it in the report by the Justice Ministries report in the most recent Acts & Proceedings; or you can search it on the PCC website. Allow me I to conclude my message today with these two paragraphs, extract of that statement:

We acknowledge that Jesus’ ministry began with his own rejection of political power and social influence and that throughout his time of ministry and teaching he continued to eschew political power and influence.

We affirm that, as followers of Jesus, so too our focus should not be control over the social, political, and economic spheres of this world but rather, like Jesus himself, loving service to God through preaching and living the Word of love, caring for the marginalized, and ministering to those in need.

That is the way of Jesus, the way, the truth and the life everlasting.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**