

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

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713-686-8254

Rev. Jim Berggren

October 18, 2026

21st Sunday after Pentecost

WORSHIP SERVICE

PRELUDE

WELCOME / ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING SONG

You Servants of God

ELW 825

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

C: *Amen.*

P: God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: *Amen.*

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

C: *We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

P: God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthens you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

C: *Amen.*

**PASTORAL GREETING
THE KYRIE**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE *This is the Feast*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also, with you.**

P: Let us pray, together.

C: **Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

October 18, 2026 – Pentecost 21A

FIRST READING: 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 hidden treasures, 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 people 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 word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

THE PSALM Psalm 96:1-9

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

*Alleluia.
Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
Alleluia.*

THE HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-22

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

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 that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax 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 image is this? And whose inscription?"

²¹ "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Congregational response: Praise to you, O Christ.

CHILDREN'S SERMON YOUTUBE VIDEO –



PENTECOST 21A, 10-18-26, Mt 22.15-22

Whose Image Do You See First?

The creative intelligence of our Lord Jesus Christ is amazing. In today's Gospel, Jesus creates the world's first Didactic Optical Illusion. It is a Rorschach Inkblot Test. He teaches that 1., you can look at anything and see an infinite number of things, 2. What you report seeing is a commentary on your immediate psychological state, and 3. It is great to see God first in everything. This passage has been used extensively to deal with questions of church and state. The words, 'church,' and 'state,' are nowhere in it. However, a coin is involved, taxes are the talking point, and the concept of image, ikon, portrait, likeness, and devotion, are dominant themes.

Palestine became a Roman Province in 6 A.D. Taxes went up steeply. GROUND TAX assessed 10% of grain crops, 20% of wine and 20% of oil. POLL TAX was an annual obligation for every male from age 14-65, and for every female from 12 to 65. That would be the charge of a denarius or a day's wage. Then add INCOME TAX, 1 % of total income. Even PUBLIC URINAL TAX. William Durant in his 3rd Volume of the *Story of Civilization*, entitled "Caesar and Christ," reports that Titus, the eventual conqueror of Jerusalem, complained to his father, Emperor Vespasian, about outrageous urinal taxes. Vespasian held the money up to his son's nose and said, "Titus, my son, see if these coins smell." These taxes supported the occupational armies, a military establishment which provided, through conquest, hundreds of thousands of slaves and their former properties and possessions. We're talking big bucks here. Judea had to support its own establishment and then additionally provide 600 talents of silver per year to Rome. 5 tons of silver! Around \$8 million.

The players in today's scripture are the Herodians, pro-Rome, and the Pharisees, anti-Rome, against Jesus. The Herodians collect taxes for Rome. The Pharisees send their disciples. They are against Roman taxes.

Once again, historian, William Durant, explains that the Roman Empire organized special forces of revenue police to examine every man's property and income. Torture was used upon the wives, children and slaves to make them reveal hidden earnings or wealth of the household. Severe penalties were enacted for evasion. Unable to openly rebel against Rome, the Pharisees switched the issue to the no-graven-images commands in the law. It is safer to discuss; no coins allowed with pictures of anybody claiming to be God, on them.

Rome, in deference to these sensibilities told the Jews to mint their own copper coins without Caesar's image. It was a cruel joke of currency devaluation. As a devout Jew you had a choice. Break the Jewish law by bringing a one-hundred-dollar Roman coin to the temple for sacrifice or observe the law by bringing its equivalent in copper coins, ten thousand pennies. Between 55 and 75 pounds, depending on the years they were minted. They would fill 265 cubic inches, the area and volume of a stock 1955 Chevy V8. It's enough to make you see red. Not God.

The interrogators of Jesus, in their anxiety, and anger, seem to have forgotten Genesis 1 and 2, where humans are created in God's Image and that image is described by attributes, not portraiture. God's Image includes three things. FREEDOM: to be a happy consumer of anything in the Garden/Universe, except from one tree, the Know-It-All Tree. RESPONSIBILITY: to exercise caring leadership, stewardship, over all of creation. And COMMUNITY. We are in this together as a cooperative adventure and a co-response with God.

The sad fact that these Pharisee disciples are seeing Caesar first when they look at a coin, just illustrates their own issues. It is appalling that such devout people would make the horrific mistake of equalizing God and Caesar. Between the two, there is no choice. That is the very issue they are opposing. God's image is stamped on all creation. And they are not seeing it.

Fear makes them miss the truth. For an example, look at the list of two decades of recent epidemics. It includes two bird flus, mad cow disease, Ebola, chikungunya, Zika, SARS, MERS, and Covid 19 with mutations. The epidemiologist's models of progression announced the deaths of billions. Didn't happen. How disappointing. But a lot of money changed hands!!

Fear is encouraged and capitalized upon by so-called experts. Their rants sound like backwater preachers drooling over an apocalyptic rapture while waving their copperheads overhead. Often panic is more dangerous than that which occasions it. CDC statistics still indicate it's more dangerous to be a fetus than it is to be 75 years old. Since the reports of UFO's and UAP's didn't really impress anybody this year and the climate hasn't changed appreciably, so as to end the world a decade ago like it was supposed to, the pundits now have moved to the end of the world by Artificial Intelligence. For my money, I'm betting on artificial stupidity instead. It's an old story. When the railroads were first built, they were boycotted by those who sincerely believed that a human would not be able to breathe at a speed of over 35 mph.

So, when you look at a coin what do you see? There is the picture of Lincoln. There is the value of what one Lincoln picture can buy. There is the hope of the benefits of having and spending a Lincoln. And in really, really, tiny print there are the words, "IN GOD WE TRUST." Which image do you see first? It's a Rorschach Inkblot test. It talks about you. What you see is who you are at that moment. Devoted to God, I am grateful for an opportunity to return to Him a portion of His great gifts to me. Devoted to Bubble Gum, I am scrambling for a down payment by hoarding a few more Lincolns.

Whose image is on the coin? The denarius had inscribed with his picture, "Tiberius Caesar, August Son of the Divine Augustus," and "Pontifex Maximus," (high priest) on the other

side. Jesus says, “Show me the money.” Brilliant! Jesus springs the trap. He doesn’t have one of those evil, idolatrous coins on him. Ironically, they do. They are convenient to carry. A Pharisee flips him a shiny new denarius. As it spins, beautifully flashing in God’s sunlight, they realize a second too late, they have lost the argument, and they slink home, amazed.

It is at this point that many preachers will tell you, “It is either idolatry or treason. There is no way to win this argument.” I’m telling you, **THERE IS NO WAY TO LOSE THIS ARGUMENT!!!** The answer is, “It’s God’s image.” If Caesar and his Herodian spies are listening, they are happily thinking that you are calling Caesar, god. That’s what he wants to see and hear. This is where that old saying comes into play, “I’m responsible for what I say. I’m not responsible for what you hear.” We all see and hear the world differently. When we report on our observations, we reveal ourselves.

If the Pharisees are listening, you just gave Caesar a black eye by implying that he is not God. Either way you win. Jesus says, “Return Caesar-stuff to Caesar. Return God-Stuff to God. And don’t forget, it is all God’s Stuff, even Caesar.”

With his “render to Caesar” statement, Jesus takes the holiness out of money. What is money? It is a convenient medium of exchange. God doesn’t care whether you have ten Sacajaweas, or ten Lincolns. We are the ones who care if we have ten dollars or ten pennies. You can get a hundred times more bubble gum for the Sacajaweas.

Money is not good or bad. It is part of God’s creation, a convenient part. I can carry 20 Ben Franklins in my pocket a lot easier than a herd of sheep or two cows. Next Sunday, everyone brings a sheep or a goat for the offering, instead of a 100-dollar-bill. The following week will be quite interesting, but at least we won’t have to pay the yard crew for mowing and fertilizing! I’d rather return the value of the eggs that God gave me through my beautiful hen, another version of His image, than put those eggs in the offering plate and risk a mess, if the usher stumbles.

The important question cuts through partisan spirit, and personal perceptions. “Can God use his creation for divine purposes?” **WHAT?????** Jesus asks an easy question, and they are baffled. They can’t answer it. They don’t dare state the obvious. Could a Roman coin serve God’s will? The testers of Jesus are speechless!

Roman coinage provided stuff for the people of God: The best highways in the world, civil security, food security, the best water supply system with aqueducts, the best sports entertainment. Not bad.

The whole last part of the Book of Acts highlights Paul’s appeal to his own Roman citizenship, because he knew he was part of the best government and judicial system in the world. Yes, we live in Babylon, but it is still the best Babylon the world has seen to date. Without the Roman government to protect Paul, we would not have received and cherished more than half of the New Testament.

Count your blessings. See God first. Readjust your ultimate commitment. Return a portion of the gifts that you have received. It is a holy offering of gratitude. Whose image gives us life?

Today's coin is worth less tomorrow, you know, inflation, depreciation. That \$200 thousand dollar Ferrari, turns into \$100 thousand bucks, one inch outside of the dealership gate.

God's worth can never be counted or discounted. What belongs to Caesar if anything? What belongs to God if not everything? We joyfully live as God's image in our Freedom, Responsibility, and Community. It is our Stewardship. It is our return. Look at any part of the Universe. Whose image do you see first? Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

We Give Thee but Thine Own

ELW 686

APOSTLES' CREED

P: God has made us His people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith:

**C: I believe in God the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**



**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

THE LORD'S PEACE (*Please share the Peace with a neighbor*)

THE OFFERING

THE OFFERTORY RESPONSE *Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful*

THE OFFERING PRAYER

All pray together:

God of creation, you send rain and the earth springs forth abundantly. All blessings are from you; make us generous with what we have. Use our gifts, our abilities, and our hearts in service to you and in love to our neighbors, today and always. Amen.

AGNUS DEI

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have, mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

P: In the night in which he was betrayed, Our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it for all to drink saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

POST COMMUNION BLESSING

The Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and preserve you in Eternal Life.

POST COMMUNION SONG *Thankful Hearts and Voices Raise*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Presider:

Sustaining God, with this bread and cup, you nourish us with mercy and abundant life. By your Spirit, send us from this table to serve a needy world. Make us living signs of your liberation, healing, and love, following the way of Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Congregation: Amen.

THE BLESSING

SENDING SONG

God of Grace and God of Glory

ELW 705

GO IN PEACE, IN SERVICE

C: Thanks be to God!

PSALM 19:14

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*



- ♣ Fred Abrego
- ♣ Susan Caradec
- ♣ Jessica Coleman
- ♣ Eli Gonzalez
- ♣ Jack Griffin
- ♣ Audrey Holtan
- ♣ Paul Houghton
- ♣ Joyce Huey
- ♣ Bryan Kile
- ♣ Brian Lindner
- ♣ Ernest Luker
- ♣ David Magrill
- ♣ Stuffy Martinez

- ♣ Jeremy Mitchell
- ♣ Geraine Moore
- ♣ Ed Peterman
- ♣ Dorothy Preuss
- ♣ Lupe Romero
- ♣ Scott Spates
- ♣ Patricia Steapp
- ♣ Gary Sundberg
- ♣ Bill Tempel
- ♣ Dave Trickett
- ♣ Jaime Urbanski
- ♣ Bennie Valites
- ♣ Michael Williams

COUNCIL MEETING

Council meeting will be Sunday, **October 18th**, at 11:00 a.m. in the Annex.

Church Council

USHERS

Month: October

Team # 04

Leader: Julie Kilkenny

LAY READERS & ASSISTANTS

OCTOBER

- 4 Reader — Mallory Hileman
P/E — Nancy Beamesderfer
- 11 Reader — Linda Cuzzort
P/E — John Stokes

18 Reader — Charlotte Jaster
P/E — Jay Byerly

25 Reader — Steve Schulze
P/E — Wendy Lambeth

P/E stands for Prayers and Eucharist
Nancy Beamesderfer

ATTENTION HOLY CROSS MEMBERS

Following the Church Safety Protocol, if you would like to make a reservation to use the church facilities for church or private events, please contact Sussy.

You must to fill out a Calendar Request Form or send an email.

Thank you.

YOUTH GROUP

Come together in faith and friendship to our new Youth Group meetings.

We meet every 2nd and 4th Wednesday
from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Youth Room.

Additional information will be available
on the church website: holycross.us and [Facebook](#).

Pr. Jim Berggren

TRUNK N TREAT

Saturday October 31st.

Trunk N Treat is coming to Holy Cross.

We have 6 cars signed up. Sign-up sheet is in Atrium. We need at least 10.
Ask friends and neighbors if they would like to join us. Set up between 4-5.
Costumes are always welcome. BYOC&C! Bring your own car and candy.

If questions, see Julie Richter.

MAM

Mark your calendar!

- Fri. & Sat. **November 6 & 7** Resale Half-Off Sale (Blalock location)

Resale store - Need volunteers for Restock Days at Blalock,

Scheduled for November 8, 1—4 p.m. Interested please contact Sussy.

The Store is always in need of plastic shopping bags so please consider recycling and donating those bags, especially in preparation for the Half—Off sale in November.

WELCA

SAVE THE DATE

Women of Holy Cross will be sponsoring a Pot luck lunch
after service Sunday, **October 25th.**

Please bring your favorite dish to share with others.

Hope to see all of you there!

Nancy Beamesderfer

THANKOFFERING

Saturday, November 21, and Sunday, November 22

The idea of collecting in small offering boxes goes back to the very early 1800's when women formed "mite" or "cent" societies to raise money. Lutheran women were given small Thankoffering boxes to place in a special location in their homes as a visible reminder of blessings received.

Women would add coins to those boxes almost daily as particular blessings were noted. From their use came the idea of an annual church service to celebrate their collection.

Thankofferings show gratitude for God's blessings and give us an important and tangible way to express that gratitude. It is a tradition grounded in our celebration of community, of meeting together to joyfully give thanks for what God has given us. Thankofferings have always been and still are, our opportunity to say thank you to God in both significant and ordinary moments.

The women of Holy Cross are encouraged to express their thankfulness by donating "coins" and/or items for the East Spring Branch Food Pantry.

Nancy Beamesderfer

FELLOWSHIP CLUB

Fellowship Club will have a potluck Mexican Food Feast
Saturday, **November 21st**, 3:00 pm here at the church!

It's gonna be a good one!

Bring your favorite Mexican dish to share!

Nancy Beamesderfer

BABY CARE KITS FOR LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

With the birth of our daughter Laura's first child coming in January, I have felt the leading to help with making more Baby Care Kits for Lutheran World Relief.

I just can't imagine as an expecting mother not having the resources to keep my baby warm, clean and dry. I am asking for your help either donating money or items from the list below.

Sizes should be between 6 to 24 months.

Please contact me at (713) 870-1297 for any questions. I will also put up poster in the Family Life Center. Thank you so much for your love and support!

Alma Byerly

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all of you for the wonderful thoughts and prayers
on our 25th Anniversary celebration.
We also would like to thank all those that came to help us celebrate.

Julie & Russell

STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY

Please join us Sunday, **October 25th**, for Stewardship Sunday. We'll be sharing information about all the activities and all the volunteer opportunities here at Holy Cross.

We've revised the map of the campus so you can review all the rooms we offer here. We've also renovated the Library and added the "Holy Cross Gift Shop", a place that you can shop for a special gift you might need, with all proceeds going to Holy Cross.

Lastly, there will be a Pot Luck lunch after the service. Please bring a favorite dish to share with the congregation. It is always fun and very delicious!

Wendy Lambeth

Safeguards Safety Training

Holy Cross Lutheran Church - 7901 Westview Drive, Houston, TX 77055

Call John Lambeth @ 713-854-8085 to register, or register online:

<https://events.humanitix.com/host/634c6d6ed7a0c9053d9f6f58>

Class		Price	Day	Date	Time
Adult CPR					
	CPR Only	\$74	Sunday		
	CPR + First Aid	\$92	Sunday	18-Oct	1:00 pm - 4:30 pm
Adult & Pediatric CPR			Saturday		
	CPR Only	\$98	Saturday		

	CPR + First Aid	\$108	Saturday	10-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Basic Life Support		\$94			
			Friday		
			Saturday		
			Saturday		
			Friday		
			Friday	9-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	17-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	24-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Friday	30-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
CPR Instructor course		\$299	Friday	2-Oct	9:00 am - 5:30 pm
RCP para adulto, niño y bebé					
	RCP solo	\$49			
	RCP + primeros auxilios	\$59			
			Saturday	31-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	5-Dec	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Holy Cross Congregation Members receive a 15% discount. Use coupon code: HCLC2026					

SUNDAY'S SCHEDULE

9:30 a.m. Traditional Worship service with Rev. Jim Berggren —WC

*Sunday School / Nursery - available for small children during the
service — Crib Room*

10:30 a.m. Coffee fellowship following the service —Gym

11:00 a.m. Church Council meeting —Annex

1—4:30 p.m. SST Adult CPR —MR/YR

2—5 p.m. Bayou City Band practice —Gym

THIS WEEK AT HOLY CROSS

19 Mon	20 Tues	21 Wed	22 Thurs	23 Fri	24 Sat
<u>CROSSTIES DEADLINE</u> <i>11—12 ELC Chapel —WC</i>	<i>11—12 ELC Chapel —WC</i>	<i>10—12 pm ELC KiM —Gym</i> <i>10 am Roundtable Group —Annex</i> <i>11 am Choir Rehearsal —CL</i> <i>12 pm Bible Study —VR</i> <i>6—8 pm Youth Group mtg. —YR</i>	<i>10—12 pm ELC KiM —Gym</i> <i>8 pm AA Women mtg. —Annex</i>		<i>1 —5:30 pm SST Basic Life Support —MR/YR</i> <i>6 pm Saturday Informal service — Stewardship —AT</i>

AT =Atrium, CL=Choir Loft, CR=Choir Room, ELC=Early Learning Center,
 FLC= Family Life Center = **GYM**, FLCA=**Annex**, KiM= Kids in Motion,
 MR=Media Room, VR=Volunteer Room, WC=Worship Center, YR=Youth Room,
 SST=Safeguards Safety Training (CPR classes)