

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster  
Sunday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, Pentecost XXI  
Exodus 33:12-23 Psalm 99 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Matthew 22:15-22

Give to the emperor that which belongs to the emperor and to God that which belongs to God.

We will get to Jesus's answer in a moment, but what does this say about the questioners, the Pharisees?

Maybe they're asking the question because they have a problem with it as well. They don't like the idea of paying taxes to Caesar either. Were they hoping that Jesus came up with an answer to their question which would satisfy them and give them a way around paying taxes to Caesar? If they did, Jesus disappointed them, and did not give them an answer which would get them out of paying the tax to Caesar.

The Pharisees had more in common with Jesus than most other groups. They were not the elite but more kind of like middle class. Even with this Jesus may be making trouble for them as well. They felt that they had too much to lose if Jesus continued. Jesus was a threat to their way of life.

With Jesus showing Caesar's face on the coin, and saying what he did, he was avoiding the trap the Pharisees were setting for him. If he said yes pay taxes to Caesar, the thought was he would lose favour and the people would stop following him. And if he said no, he could be arrested by the Romans. But what about his answer?

Jesus says elsewhere, we cannot serve two masters. My initial thought is a hierarchy of masters and possibly a connection between the two. The image that comes to mind is a circle within a larger circle. The larger circle is what belongs to God, in other words everything comes from God, and the smaller inner circle is about Caesar.

Today we pay taxes and expect benefits from paying those taxes and we can question the so-called emperor but not then, or certainly not in the same way. Today the value of being a responsible citizen and a member of the community. In the best sense the government is to be of help to one and all. We pay taxes to provide a safety net for those most vulnerable and for benefits to all.

But both systems are transactional. At the time of Jesus, the elite were to take care of those lower on the social scale. And the poor were to show their gratitude for what they received from the rich, paying taxes was one way. (this according to Diana Butler Bass) and both systems are hierarchical.

And with God though, the system is neither transactional nor hierarchical. Last week we heard about the wedding banquet. And those who refuse to come to the banquet. Maybe they didn't want to come to the banquet to give up their place in the hierarchy to sit at the table with those they deem unworthy.

So, in a sense Jesus is saying the two don't go together, that we need to be as equals and love unconditionally, rather than as the way of the emperor, and certainly the way of the emperor does not include the way of Jesus. Remember, the way of the emperor meant worshipping the emperor as a God. Therefore, there is no place for Jesus and God in the Roman system.

Amen.

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet  
walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands  
stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart  
open your hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ in ev'ryone you meet,  
And may ev'ryone you meet see the face of Christ in you. Amen.