

Matthew 22:15-22

Children's Message:

Have you ever given away something? What? (offering, \$\$, a gift, time, etc.)

What are some things that God has given you?

Who do you belong to? (parents), who else do you belong to? (God!). The bible tells us today to "Give to God what belongs to God". The Bible says that we were created by God and that we were created in the image of God. If we are created by God, and we were created in His image, we must belong to Him. That means we must give ourselves to Him...our time, our money, our niceness to others...our gifts!. And when we give things to others, we are giving ourselves to God because God made all people and He wants us to care for each other, and one way we can do this is by giving things to others.

God gives us everything in our lives...and everything in our church. As you head back to your seats, take a thank you card and write or draw what you are thankful for at your church because it's important to say thank you! It's important to say Thank you when someone gives us something, and it's important to say thank you to God, who gives us all things! And then I'll invite you to drop your cards in the offering plates when it's time for our offering. And we will post some of the things that you are all thankful for around the church or in our newsletter next month!

Dear Father, you created us in your image and we belong to you. Because of that, we give our hearts and lives to you. Thank you for everything that you have given us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Matthew 22:15-22

Adult Message

(Take out a coin/Dollar if you have one):

What does this coin or dollar tell us about who we are?

Every coin or dollar that is made in America has the words “The United States of America” printed on it somewhere. This money belongs to the United States of America. We are a part of the United States in order that we might possess this coin/dollar. Much of our identity has to do with the fact that we are a part of this nation.

Every coin or dollar has a face on it. A historical figure. Someone who had a part in shaping this country that we live in today.

“In God we Trust”. Does that tell you anything about your identity?

On all of our American coins, you will see the word “Liberty” somewhere on that coin. A proclamation of our freedom. Our freedom to understand that these coins in our pocket are a statement of our highest aspirations or perhaps they are an expression of the uncertainty we feel about our own civic creed regarding freedom of religion and the words “In God we Trust” that are found on these coins.

All of our coins or dollar bills bear images that tell us something about our nation...something about ourselves. The same is true with currency throughout the world, and the same was true with the currency of Jesus’ day.

Take a look at this coin of Jesus’ day (show on screen). This coin is called a denarius and it is equivalent to 1 days pay. This is the coin that was used to pay taxes to Caesar and also tells a story about the people of Jesus’ day.

Jews in first century Palestine, you see, paid numerous taxes with their coins: Temple taxes, land taxes, and customs taxes. In today’s Gospel reading, we hear about a particular tax that the people must pay – and a particularly burdensome one at that. We hear about the Imperial tax. The Imperial tax was paid as tribute to Rome to support the Roman occupation of Israel. That’s right: first-century Jews were required to pay their oppressors a denarius a year to support their own oppression. Rome was in control and they had to pay for it.

And so when the Herodians come to Jesus in our Gospel story today asking him whether or not people should pay this tax of oppression, well, they knew that no matter how Jesus answered their question, that someone would be upset with Jesus.

To those who worked for the Roman government, as the Herodians did, this tax was not a problem. To those who were being oppressed by the Roman government, such as the

townspeople and religious people were, this Tax seemed cruel. This tax was a constant reminder of the humiliation and oppression that Caesar continued to put them through. And furthermore, this tax forced the religious people to break the first 2 commandments since they had to pay the tax with a coin engraved with a picture of Caesar Tiberius as a proclamation of his divinity.

And so, with their question about the Imperial tax, Jesus' foes thought they had him trapped, as he would either disappoint the people by advocating for the tax or put himself in jeopardy with Roman officials by arguing against it.

"So Jesus, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?"

Jesus asked them to show him a coin...the denarius...the coin that they had to use to pay the Imperial tax to Caesar.

So they pulled out a denarius. (*refer to screen*)

And Jesus asked them, "whose head is this, and whose title?" – in Greek, the literal translation we have here is "image" or "representation". So Jesus is asking them, "Whose image is this? Whose representation is this?"

The key word here is image. Whose image is on this coin? The coin bore the image of Caesar. The conflict was that the Jews thought the money should go to God and God alone. But Jesus is making a good point here. The coin that is required for the tax was created in the image of Caesar. "So give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's...and give to God the things that are God's."

And it said they were amazed...Baffled, really...and they left him and went away. Jesus put them in their place...again. Man. I love when Jesus does this.

This coin may have been created in the image of Caesar, but you and I are created in the image of God. So Jesus is saying, "What does it matter that you give these coins to Caesar. God wants the worship of people; the image bearer; the being that was made in the image of God. Coins will burn up and pass away but the people of God will remain forever."

You and me. Made in the image of God. And this image can sometimes be hard to recognize. When we look at each other, or in the mirror, we tend to see the inscriptions that our business with the world has left on us: you are what you look like, what you have, what you wear, what you do, the company you keep...the money you have. But underneath all those inscriptions is a much deeper mark: the watery sign of a cross made once upon a time on the forehead, the promise that you are a child of God...made in HIS image.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's...but give to God what is God's". You are God's beloved. Your whole being...your whole life...your whole everything! So give your everything to God! Your

finances, your work, your family, your political views, your lives. You see, it's all God's and everything that we do is about who we are as a part of our image...our identity in Christ.

What image is impinged on your heart? Is it the image of Caesar? Of money that drives your decisions? Of sports or winning or work or selfishness? Of regret or broken relationships? Or is it the image of God? Of love, compassion, and rendering our entire lives to him, in which our decisions are then based out of this image in which we have been made?

If we fully believe that we are made in the image of God, we will see why "Give back to God what is God's" is a powerful instruction from Jesus today. It provides us with motivation for what we say and do in all parts of life.

And when Caesar...when this world...thinks that everything you own belongs to it, you will know otherwise. You will live otherwise. And then all of a sudden, the government, our money, our addictions and all things we think we must do or must have does not control us anymore, but instead we live life and we use all that we have to bear the image of God that we were made in. "Give to God the things that are God's". That's everything! That's our whole being! That's our actions and words and resources and time!

On the ends of each pew, I have placed a black marker. Perhaps we can take that marker and take out our wallets and place a cross on our debit or credit card. Or if you don't have a credit card, how about on a dollar bill or a coin? Mark that which consumes so much of our lives with the sign of the cross to remind you that you are God's. Named and claimed. And all that we have and are is God's. And all that God has and is is also ours! Mark your credit card or your dollar bills with the sign of the cross so that you are reminded of this...you are reminded that your faith...your image...your being impacts all that you do...all your decisions and all your life. Do our purchases align with our own sense of values and God-given identity? How does your faith impact your decisions about spending? Be reminded of your identity in Christ...your identity as a child of God...something no amount of spending or saving could ever change. How does your faith shape your daily life and, dare I say it, your economic life?

God wants for us abundant life. Because while Benjamin Franklin may have once said that death and taxes are the only two certainties of this life, we can be assured that the one who was raised from death shows us that God's love is more certain than anything else.

You are a child of God.

Amen.