

Matthew 22: 15-21

**Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.
So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying:
“Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and
teach the way of God in accordance with truth,
and show deference to no one;
for you do not regard people with partiality.**

Tell us, then, what do you think: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?

**But Jesus, aware of their malice, said,
‘Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?
Show me the coin used for the tax.
And they brought him a denarius.
Then he said to them, ‘Whose head is this, and whose title?’
They answered ‘The emperor’s.
Then he said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and
to God the things that are God’s.**

**When they heard this, they were amazed....
and they left him and went away.**

Meditation:

**Last Wednesday I had the delightful privilege of sitting over at the farm under the
pumpkin tent, just in case someone wanted to buy a pumpkin...
or some honey...or a few gourds.**

Business was slow, but the weather was stunning: sunny and 70.

and just enough of a breeze to keep the bugs and bees away...
And as I sat there from noon till 5pm,
I could smell the hay
and see the pumpkin fields.
I watched the sun traverse the blue sky
and heard children squealing with delight...

Such a gift of soo much beauty.
And I wondered:
To whom does this land,
this earth,
these smells,
this laughter,
this sunshine...
to whom does it belong?

We call all of this The Center...we tend the land, the fields,
we care for the children and the animals
but in truth, all of this, is not 'ours'...

Our chapel building sits on a small parcel of land...
truly just a bit of the 78 acres that comprises The Center...
Does the Chapel belong to the Center?
Does it belong to God because it is a "church"?

Often times when we hold services outside I like to think of being in
"God's Chapel"...but does that mean this little building isn't?
Where does what is God and what is the 'emperor's' end? or begin?
Although...many of us have been taught that there was such a dividing line:

some places are holy and some are not ...

You had to go church to meet God...

which, of course, then implied that if you stayed at home in bed...

God was not there!

Really?????

But in fact there is no such division!

All creation is sacred because God created it all!

Therefore...all things, all beings, all places belongs to the Creator...

If we look upon anything as ‘unholy’ or not of God,

it is only our blindness,

our lack of awareness,

our denial of the presence of the Divine in all things...

So if everything belongs to God...

and if there really is no separation...

So what is this Gospel all about?

Many people look at this Story as Jesus’ affirmation of our modern day notion separation of Church and State but back in Jesus’ day there was no such separation.

The Jews literally believed that Yahweh was their King...

acknowledging anyone else as King and Ruler would be idolatry....

But ancient Israel, at that time, was an occupied land:

Caesar was their emperor... their ruler and all the currency

that was needed to pay taxes to Rome

had Caesar’s image as Lord and King...

So what were they to do?

**Well...the Romans actually did make a concession to the Jews:
they issued valid currency that was plain. No images, No Caesar.
So why did the Pharisees, those super stickler law abiding Jews,
have Caesar's coin with them?????
Well...I really don't know, but that is somewhat besides the point.
The point is that they had one,
when they should not have had one...
and thus they were in violation of the Torah...The Law...
Those who presented themselves as the ultimate keepers of the Law,
were indeed, as sinful for breaking it as any of those whom they judged or condemned.**

**When the Pharisees with the Herodians in tow
came to ask Jesus their question, they buttered him up with flattery.
they wanted to trick him, to make him land on one side of the question or the other
If he said they should pay their taxes to Rome,
then they could claim he didn't care about Yahweh...
and his Jewish followers would leave him...**

**If he said they shouldn't pay their taxes,
he would be accused of political insurrection and be dealt with by Rome.**

**Jesus apparently knew what they were up to ...
so instead of following their lead and directly answering their question,
instead of falling into the trap of black and white
either/or
yes or no...
he asks for a coin...
and lo and behold they offer the coin of Caesar!**

The argument is over.

They have just incriminated themselves and everyone present knew It.

Jesus, then offers his now famous:

Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

and give to God what belongs to God.

Again: this is not support for the separation of Church and State...

however right and just this is..

he is simply refusing to be pulled into one corner or another

by people who are hypocritical and malicious.

The Pharisees and Herodians weren't really interested in the question of taxation..

they wanted to trap and ensnare this trouble maker.

In scripture as far as I can read,

the only people Jesus got mad at were the religious hypocrites.

The sinners of his day: the prostitutes and others he invited to change their ways...

the sick and the poor...who were told they were sinful, by the Pharisees

because they were sick and poor,

Jesus assured them of God's love and often healed them...

but he was never angry with them.

His anger was reserved for those who bullied and oppressed others

and who claimed righteous superiority all the while refusing to acknowledge

their own sinfulness and shadow.

What does all that mean?

I think it means as I have often said before:

God ...Jesus...does not expect perfection, only honesty.

**It is not about being perfectly good according to some human standard,
but about allowing the love of God to flow into our minds,
out of our hearts
and through our lives.**

**It is not about guilt but about awareness,
not about judgment but about mercy
not about punishment but about forgiveness.**

This all takes the need for pretending, for being hypocritical out of the game.

There is no need to pretend perfection when it is not important.

There is no need to hide our shadow because:

- a. that only makes our shadow stuff more powerful**
 - and b. it tempts us to think we are better than others...**
- and Lordy knows: that is foolish.**

**Those who think they are better than others are setting themselves up
for a harsh reckoning, a painful awakening.**

Because God's love extends to all without condition.

Each of us have our issues,

our struggles,

our personal failures.

All of us fall short some of the time....

all of us meet our own expectations some of the time...

sometime we feel like we are miserable, selfish fools...

and sometimes we know our own divine nature!

In truth...

there are only those who trust in God's unconditional love

and those who don't.

and that is the essential meaning of Faith

and THAT is what GOOD NEWS is truly all about!

and for this we can be grateful! Amen....