**10/22/23**

**2 Sides of a Proverbial Coin**

**Matthew 22:15-22**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Whew! What a relief it is to have you all back here in the pews and on the conference call here this morning. It is nice to be back to the so-called form of normal we have gotten used to for the past few years. I admit it was very interesting and frustrating being back on the conference call only again! I am sure many of you felt the same way. However, I am extremely thankful that we were respectful of each other’s health and safety last week. I will admit that I honestly debated staying home and really doing things the way we used to in the past. However, I felt I had a responsibility to you, God, and the very meal that we celebrate together here at this very table. Now, you might be sitting there and scratching your heads at that comment, and you may understand things rather easily in the context of where my mindset was. Yes, I know not everything is as easy as it seems to be. Things are indeed just as complex as today’s Gospel Reading, even though they really do not seem to present that way from first observation. So, let me explain my mindset and reasoning a little more to you as I continue painting the picture of last week and how it relates to today’s Gospel Reading as well.

So, if you could imagine it was super weird being up here at the altar and preaching to an empty church. I will admit that I tried to picture many of you in your pews that you usually sit in. I even tried to picture some of the things you all do during the worship service to continue to help me keep my focus and move along as well. You know, just maybe I should have had planned ahead a little bit more and had some cardboard cut-outs like they used to have at sporting events back in the day. Maybe, just maybe, I should have brought some of Heather’s big stuffed Hello Kitty’s and placed them around in various church pews. No matter what I might have done it was nevertheless awkward and interesting. However, I again do feel it was vitally important for everyone to be home and safe. I also feel it was vitally important for me to be at this table to not have to have to deal with a question like Jesus is dealing with today in our Gospel Reading. As I told you last Sunday, the reason I chose to be physically present at the altar was to provide no question or concern over the validity of communion. I know we have dealt with several questions and discussions with it over the past year or so, and especially when Pastor Leah had retired and was still attending church. So, I cleared up any concern or issue and I stood here at the table, and you all joined me at this very table in a virtual manner on the conference call, and we communed together. We gave honor and glory to God being present with us at the meal as we were supposed to, and we were not caught up in some conundrum like Jesus is dealing with today. We even indeed heard this echoed in today’s introduction “To gather for worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the service of God and for the sake of the world.” (1) We indeed offered our respect and love last week while keeping things in a context that outlined some of the very rules that are hard to deal with or operate in this earthly way of life’s expectations and practices.

Now, today’s Gospel Reading may be one of the simplest and easiest Gospel Reading’s to summarize in the history of all my sermons. But…. Is it?!?! I caution you that there indeed is two sides to the proverbial coin that we are dealing with here today. And no, I also am not simply speaking of heads and tails here. For that fact I am not just simply speaking of an actual coin. I am speaking of several different things. There are two sides to the group of people that Jesus encounters that are asking him questions. There are two sides to his response. There are even two sides to the way that they react to his response. So, let us not try and make this so simple that we miss all of the key points that Jesus is trying to get across to each and every one of us here today.

As we manage to reset our scene here again it allows us to explore things a little deeper. So, here we go! Jesus walks up on two groups of people that you would simply not expect to be hanging out together. Come on Vince, it already sounds like we are off to one of those bad jokes you hear someone tell you from time to time. However, let me assure you that is not where I am going. So, these two groups of people that don’t typically hang out with one another were actually in agreement and on the same page with one another for a split second. Well, any one of us can see there is something wrong here! Something is rather fishy, or has run amuck. This caused Jesus’ proverbial Spidey senses to go up. He did not need to be any kind of super sleuth or detective like Columbo or Angela Lansbury here. So, as the story continues on and they team up together, they actually ask a rather simple, but yet rather complex question. This is where Jesus is keen enough to know they have an underlying purpose to their devilish union. He is more than aware of the fact that there is always more than one answer or perspective to any situation as well. He answers in such a marvelous manner to avoid any kind of conundrum. He does not want to put his ministry or life in jeopardy, he does not want to affect the people of the day and those of us that are yet to come and are sitting here listening to this very message today. He also does not want to commit treason. So, he draws back and provides a very pointed answer that draws light to two kingdoms. Yes, I just indeed said two kingdoms. If you are not familiar with this terminology, “It is a teaching that says God works through both the church to bring salvation and care for Christians, and also through other parts of his creation, including governments to care for the world.” (3) So, we indeed learn that he allows for the responsibility of money being paid to the ruling or governing body of the time to uphold the rules and order of society. He justifies the purpose of government, even though it might not always be aligned with what is best for society or the kingdom. However, he admits there of course is an importance and need for it, or it would not have been created.

Then, there is of course a flip side, or second side of the coin. He also informs them that they should indeed give with the heart and capacity of respecting the Lord as well. This honestly is kind of an ugh huh moment quite frankly. Ugh huh in regards to getting out of the simplistic mindset of not just looking at what is physically in front of you. Yes, the very coin they were asking about was there. The image of the emperor, Caesar, was indeed on it, but there was another side. Again, I do not really mean of the so-called physical coin. I mean of society, of life, of everything in general. He is broadening the vision and perspective everyone should have here. He put these two groups of people on blast, and informed them that they can give and it can represent other forms and means as well. He yet again turned the tables over of the money changers, but in another dramatic fashion. So, what else does this leave us to explore here this morning? We pretty much got the point here now, and we have summarized things pretty well. We can move right on with our Worship Service, can’t we? Well…. not so fast!

So, let us draw back a bit and dive a little deeper and highlight things a little more. I want to make sure I am not missing anything, and I want to make sure you leave here with a clear concept and mindset to be able to share with others if the question comes up about what you heard about or learned in church today. “Thus, Jesus’ response to the question meant to entrap him, traps us all! We live as citizens of two kingdoms – an earthly kingdom, to which we owe certain allegiances, and a heavenly kingdom to which we owe everything. Jesus’ response doesn’t really settle the dispute between the Herodians and the Pharisees, any more than it settles the conflict that each of us face as we try to live out our faith today. Rather, Jesus invites us into the struggle. He invites us to acknowledge that our government has a right to expect a certain allegiance from us, but the allegiance we owe our earthly kingdoms is limited. What we owe to God is not. And when we perceive a conflict of allegiance, when we believe that our earthly authority is in conflict with God’s authority, we are the ones who must follow our conscience, and the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, to resolve the conflict.” (4)

We have also learned that “During Jesus’ time the leaders of the church did one thing but believed another. It was the same during the time of Martin Luther. The church taught the way to eternal life was through works. The motto of the church, during Jesus and Luther’s time, really was: pay, pray and obey. The gospel had almost disappeared. The simple saving message of the gospel reveals that Christ has paid the price, which we could not and cannot ever repay. Christ has obeyed because of our disobedience. Still today some churches compromise God’s gospel. Some like to emphasize what man has to do to be saved. BUT Christ has done it all. Pay, pray, and obey is still alive and well today. Such a teaching robs and turns God’s saving Gospel into poison.” (5) We should forever be reminded, and remind others that, “We are saved by grace through faith, not works.” (5)

“We are the coins of God’s realm, of his kingdom. If we are to “give to God the things that are God’s,” then we must conclude from our Lord’s teaching that there is no limit to what we owe God. We owe God our whole being, our very life, all that is ours. No part of our life is excluded from our fundamental covenant with the one who is our Creator, and who has redeemed us from sin and death to make us citizens of his kingdom.” (4) So, let this serve as a continued reminder to always look at both sides of the proverbial coin.

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year A 2023

October 22nd, 2023

21st Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

God's At Work Restoring Our Perspective: Everything Is Sacred

Contributed by Richard Schwedes on Oct 21, 2008

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-22

Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

Two Kingdoms

Contributed by Ronald Harbaugh on Oct 8, 2005

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-22

Denomination: Lutheran

(5) SermonCentral.com

God's Enemies Oppose Jesus' Authority

Contributed by Timm Meyer on Nov 12, 2007

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-22

Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 22:15-22**

In today’s first reading God uses the Gentile ruler Cyrus to accomplish divine

purposes. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus, he tells them to give the

emperor what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God. To gather for

worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any

earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the

service of God and for the sake of the world.

After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap him with

questions. First they ask if God’s people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like

Caesar.

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. 16So

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. 17Tell

us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” 18But

Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you

hypocrites? 19Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a

denarius. 20Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?”

21They 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.”

22When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.