

Adult Sunday School

The Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost 2020 (Lectionary 29 A)

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] 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 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.

Matthew 22:15-22

1. Throughout the Gospel, Matthew has been weaving a narrative portraying Jesus to be the fulfillment of Hebrew Scripture: Jesus is the son of Abraham, through whom all nations are blessed. The New Moses, the deliverer. The embodiment of the Prophets, bringing justice and rightness to the world. And Immanuel, God With Us, who *stays* with us even to the end of the age. Why is this good news?
2. "Religious leaders in Matthew have a long history of testing Jesus in the hope of getting him to say something incriminating (16:1; 19:3). This instance is no exception. In response, he asks for a coin they typically used to pay taxes. The emperor's image and inscription on the coin were reminders that the Roman empire was present in every realm of their lives. The image and the inscription also identify who controls the economy. The fact that they produced the coin so quickly also exposes the extent to which everyone, including (or especially) the Pharisees and the Herodians, have been participating in Caesar's economy willingly or because they have no other choice. They are all trading in Caesar's economy, so they are legally obligated to pay the tax. And Jesus is not about to encourage those at the margins to defy the empire and jeopardize their lives."¹ Have you ever worked for a cause, but found multiple (even coordinated) roadblocks that keep you from doing the work you are passionate about?
3. In this point in Matthew's Gospel story, Jesus has challenged the powerful in ways that are beginning to threaten his life. His message about God's love is transformative for many, although it is a difficult word for people in powerful and privileged positions. How is God challenging you to be open to the more challenging messages of Jesus?
4. In what ways can we "give to God what is God's"?

¹ Professor Raj Nadella, workingpreacher.org, commentary for the Gospel for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Oct 18, 2020).