

**October 22, 2017 – *And***

Given by Pastor Mattei

“Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (Matthew 22:17)

The Pharisees’ question may be paraphrased as “Are taxes in line with the Torah?” “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s” Jesus said, “and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mt 22:21) The Pharisees had hoped to trick Jesus into upsetting the crowds by getting him to endorse the unfair tax policies of the empire or, more likely, they hoped he would speak against paying taxes and then the empire would arrest Jesus. Is it going to be cooperation with or resistance to the Roman Empire? Is Jesus going to get in trouble with the Roman officials or with the nationalists? As is often the case, Jesus does not respond as others expect.

The type of question posed to Jesus required a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Jesus did not fall into the trap. Jesus shows us that we don’t simply have to react to the world around us. We don’t have to take option ‘a’ or ‘b’ simply because those are the options presented to us, but instead we are called to take or to create the option that is faithful to God. We respond to the reality around us informed by faith.

As God’s people in the world, we live under a set of rules established by the government. We pay taxes and the government provides services. We give to the emperor, what is the emperor’s.

At the same time, Jesus manages to turn the answer around into a spiritual challenge to be diligent about “God’s things.” We give to God what is God’s which means that we are constantly trying to determine how we can live and act faithfully in the world. We give back to God as God has given to us, first of all, by supporting ministries we believe in with financial resources and through our gifts of time and expertise.

It isn’t always easy, but as followers of Jesus we try to live faithfully in the world giving to the world what is the world’s while at the same time giving to God our love and obedience. So whatever it is we are doing, thinking, saying, or not, are we giving God the glory? Where is God in what we are thinking, saying, doing? Is it honorable? Is it life-producing? Is it making life more beautiful and richer for all even for those who do not look, sound, think and live like me?

Jesus does not say: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s ***but*** to God what is God’s.” No, he says: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s ***and*** to God what is God’s.” We give to God at the moment we are giving to Caesar if whatever we are doing glorifies God. if it does not, then we need to re-evaluate what it is we are doing. We might be paying our taxes to Caesar but are our taxes going to benefit all of God’s children? Are all of God’s children going to be treated with respect, dignity, protection and equanimity? Is anyone being left to fend for themselves? Are all receiving an equal share of food, housing, education, health care and legal representation? Or are some of us less citizens, less human than others? When we are giving to Caesar, are we supporting evil and becoming instruments and accomplices of demeaning practices? Or do we give to God as we give to Caesar and therefore resist to be drawn in unhealthy behaviors?

The gospel may not be suggesting any political theology but it is certainly challenging us to think a little harder about what it is that we mean when we say that all belongs to God and that we are about “God’s things” or “God’s values.” Is the Spirit of God *in* what we are doing? *In* our life? Or do we live a fragmented, divided life? What needs to be realigned, transformed, redeemed?

Let us pray for the courage to confess our inability to love God in all we do and for the wisdom to seek ways to give glory to God.