

10/18/26
21st Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from October 11th – October 17th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 22:1-14) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 22:15-22

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Why do the Pharisees ask Jesus the difficult question in verse 17?
2. What would have been at stake for Jesus if he answered yes? What if he answered no?
3. What does Jesus point out about the coin?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What are some things in your life that compete for your loyalty?
2. What does it mean in your life to give "to God the things that are God's"?
3. When have you experienced a situation where there wasn't an easy answer because two important responsibilities were in tension?

Memorize this verse: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21) What do you struggle to give to God?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 96:1-9. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

We are at the point in Matthew's story about Jesus where things are getting pretty tense. Earlier in the week, Jesus had entered Jerusalem and been greeted by adoring crowds in Matthew 21. Riding this wave of popular acclaim, he immediately enters the Temple and overthrows the tables of the money-changes, challenging both the political and religious powers that be. Confronted by the religious leaders regarding the authority behind his actions, Jesus tells several provocative, even threatening parables calling into question their own authority and standing before God. It's for this reason that two groups that normally wanted little to do with each other declare a temporary truce in order to work together to trap this upstart rabbi. The question they pose is beyond clever, asking Jesus whether it was lawful to pay the tax that funded Roman occupation. Should Jesus answer in the affirmative, the adoration of the crowds would likely not simply evaporate but rather be turned into opposition. Should he answer negatively, he will have positioned himself over and against the Romans, never a wise thing to do. So, they've got him trapped.

Or at least that's what they think. Because if their question is clever, Jesus' response is ingenious or, more appropriately, inspired. Leading to an exchange that is as revealing as it is brief. After asking if any of his questioners has a coin of the Empire, they quickly procure one. Jesus asks whose image is on it, and they answer, "The Emperor's." There's more going on here than meets the eye, as along with that image is an engraved confession of Caesar's divinity, which means that any Jew holding the coin is breaking the first two of the commandments. All of which leads to Jesus' closing line, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And with this one sentence, Jesus does not simply evade their trap or confound their plans but issues a challenge to his hearers that reverberates through the ages in our lives. There are any number of ways we might interpret Jesus' forceful, but also enigmatic, response. Here's one way I find particularly helpful. Likeness is the word used in the Septuagint (Greek translation) in the opening chapter of Genesis and is also the word Matthew chooses. So, a better translation of verse 20 is likely, "Whose likeness is this, and what title?" I don't know how many of Jesus' audience would have caught that, but I suspect those listening closely to Jesus' word choice would have harkened back to God's initial pronouncement and promise: We bear God's likeness and are therefore made to be more than we sometimes realize. Pause for a moment to let that sink in. We were made in the image and likeness of God, and because we bear God's likeness we are to act like God. Not mind you, like gods, those who lord their authority over others for self-gain, but rather like God. The One who creates and sustains and nurtures and redeems and saves. We are called to serve as God's agents, God's partners, and God's co-workers, exercising dominion over creation not as an act of power but rather as an act of stewardship and extending to all the abundant life God wishes for all.

Notice that even though Jesus' opponents carry a coin with a graven image and confession of Caesar's divinity, Jesus accuses them of neither blasphemy nor disloyalty. Rather, he calls them hypocrites, those who have quite literally taken to wearing another, and false, likeness. So perhaps the charge against those trying to entrap or discount Jesus then or now is best understood as amnesia, for they have forgotten who they are, in whose likeness they were made. So maybe this text serves as a reminder back to our identity as God's children and stewards, as those made in the likeness of God and charged to act like the God we see in Jesus.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen