

October 18, 2020

Carol reflects on Matthew 22:15-22

There are words, that when repeated over and over again are supposed to stick in our minds and hearts and become touchstones for us.

Wash your hands,
Keep 6 feet apart
Stay home when you are sick

--Those are the words of our days these days. We have heard them, we know them, and we are supposed to live them.

The other part of that, is that we are living in a time of questions – have you travelled out of the province? Do you have a sore throat? Runny nose? Cough? All sorts of questions are being asked of us before we step into the dentist's office, or the doctor's office, or the library – or anywhere really.

Being asked questions over and over is a part of the reality of our days these days.

Being asked questions over and over was also a part of the reality of Jesus' day. Only, for Jesus, the questions were not about his physical health – they were often questions that were designed to discredit him – to trick him into trouble.

Today's Gospel is a great example of that. Matthew tells the story of Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem. He is in conflict with the 'authorities'. He is turning the tables of the money changers and telling parables. Today's reading is the start of the debates.

You can almost hear a sneer in their tone as the Pharisees and the Herodians have plotted to entrap him.

'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?'

If he says Yes, then the people will turn against him.

If he says No, then it will give the authorities even more reason to persecute him. But Jesus will not be done in by their trickery. He asks them for a coin – something that their faith should prohibit them from having because it bears the image of Caesar and the claim of his place as the son of God – but sure enough – they have one.

We know how the story goes – whose face is on the coin? Caesar's/the emperor's Then give to the emperor the thing that are the emperor's.

And then – the crux – and give to God the things that are God's?

What is it that are the things that are God's? If the coin the bears the image of the emperor belongs to the emperor – what bears the image of God.

Oh Jesus – you are making us think of the beginning of Genesis...God creates – the heavens, the earth, light, darkness, water, plants, creatures that filled with seas and the skies. And that completed 5 days. Then...

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind...and then God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in God's image..."

Give to God what is God's... Give to God what bear's God's image.

That's the twist.

We bear God's image. We are called to give ourselves to God. Those are the words that we are called to hear again and again and again so that they become touchstones for us.

We are beloved children of God. We are just like salt. We are light. We are called to bring forth the very best from others. We are called to shine our lights into places of desperation and decay. We are to let that identity echo in everything we say and do.

The Rev. Rafael Malpica-Padilla tells a story of a colleague, Father Edmond Delatorio, a priest serving in the Philippines years ago, who was imprisoned for advocating in favour of the poor and oppressed people. In prison, he asked for bread and wine so he could have communion. Shortly after, he asked for more bread and wine, as his cellmate wanted to have communion too. The request for bread and wine increased every day until the whole cell block was celebrating together. Through the sharing of bread and wine they became a community of equals together—remembering that they were beloved children of God. The warden heard about this, and immediately banned it. He wrote in his order "Bread and wine in the hands of this priest becomes a revolutionary weapon."

Those words of communion that remind us of our connection to the Christ, and our place as God's children are not to be taken lightly. We have shared the Bread of Life and the Cup of Joy. We are called to give to God what is God's is to remind us of our calling, and our identity. This is not to be disregarded or discarded.

May it echo as our touchstone.