

Sermon Oct 22, 2023

Give to God that which belongs to God.

The Pharisees and the Herodians have joined forces. We are in the middle of Holy week. Jesus is in Jerusalem. The last few weeks Jesus has shared some difficult Parables. The wedding feast where one of the guests is brutalized for not dressing appropriately, the Father who asks both sons to work in the field, one says he will but doesn't and the other says no but goes. As well as when a land owner sends servants and a son to claim his produce only to have them killed. The Pharisees have been trying to discredit Jesus for a while. So they get their disciples together with the supporters of Herod. They all want to be there for what they believe will be the end of Jesus's teachings. The Pharisees are the legal minds of God's chosen people. They are the ones to uphold the laws and practices of the community. The Herodians are supporters of the Roman government, and want to make sure that the laws of Rome are being followed. Either way, Jesus will certainly say something that is unlawful. Or so they believe. This partnership is unexpected. These are men who are normally at odds with each other. But they combined to catch Jesus saying something offensive to one group or another. Let me point out that

the Pharisees didn't go themselves, but sent disciples. If they catch Jesus supporting King Herod, they can boast that they sent the disciples. However, if it goes the other way, they can say, well they are only disciples. But first they give him some false flattery. "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." While that might have been true, they were trying to lull him into a false sense of security. They ask if it is lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor. But Jesus is on to them. He knows what they are searching for. If he says yes to paying taxes, well the Pharisees will tell others how he is a false prophet. But if he says no to paying taxes, well, then Herod's men have him for treason. They figure, either way, they have him. This will be the end of his "Kingdom of God". But they aren't interested in real change, they just want to put an end to this.

Jesus asks for a denarius. This was the amount a person would make in a day. He was not surprised that they had a denarius in their pocket. The average person would have spent this on food for their families. But they were trying to keep money for themselves, they are hoarding treasures. He asks, "Why are you

putting me to the test, you hypocrites?” Instead of answering them, he poses the question, “whose image is on the coin?” Well, it’s the Emperor. Then as an answer he replies, “pay to the Emperor what belongs to him.” Then he adds, “give to God that which belongs to God.” They are shocked at this answer. They just walk away. There is no argument that they can present.

Our initial response is to say, "Everything belongs to God." That is true. But what bears the inscription and image of God explicitly? We do. You do. Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness”.... Jesus wants us to see ourselves as belonging to God. We bear the image of God. To be God's image-bearers does not mean that we are superior to others. It means that we submit to others with humility and love. God is expecting us to live holy and upright lives full of honesty, integrity, and love. And our possessions? We need to remember that they belong to God. They are gifts from God. We are to use them to his glory!

How often have we tested God? How often do we challenge God’s will in our lives? It’s not like we aren’t in good company, right? Moses challenged God when God wanted him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses claimed to have no power, God

gave him power. Moses claimed to not have the right words to use. Moses claimed to be slow of speech and bad with words. God took care of it. He allowed his brother Aaron to join him and promised to give them the words to use.

What about Peter denying Christ 3 times? If that's not a challenge, I don't know what is!

And my favorite is Jonah. He is being told by God to go to Nineveh. Jonah says, thanks, but I think I'll go the other direction. He had no desire to do God's bidding. He wanted nothing to do with Nineveh! And look what happened to him!

Through Baptism, we belong to God. Jesus is calling us to give, fully, of ourselves to God, all that we have. That looks differently to everyone depending on your own gifts. In Colossians 3:12 it says

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

In our baptism, in your baptism, the Pastor made the sign of the cross on your forehead, spoke your name and exclaimed, Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. I love these words. Think about it. As often as I have turned away from God or challenged him, he never left me alone. I think about some of the youth that I have cared for in the past. I know they are not currently practicing faith. But this assurance, that they are named and claimed by God, is all I need. They are in good hands. God loves them. God loves you and me.

So turn to your neighbor if you are comfortable. Make the sign of the cross on their forehead or on their hand. Say to them, you are a child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Now go, and give to God what is God's. You, beloved, are a child of God.