

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Today we are shown the ugly face of sin. We see it in the faces of those Pharisees who have rejected Christ and His authority – who have refused to repent and say Yes to the Father after they have said No – who have claimed the vineyard as their own, refused God’s messengers and His invitation to the Feast, and even now are plotting to kill His Son. Theirs are the ugly faces of treachery, jealousy, hatred, murder, and lies that now plot to destroy Jesus by laying a cleverly designed trap (v15) – a trap that begins with a disguise so that Jesus won’t recognize their true face.

The minions of the Pharisees, along with some Herodians, put on their pretty faces and begin by buttering Him up: “Teacher – We know that you’re the go-to guy, that you’ve got all the answers – that you teach the way of God truthfully (v16), and that you don’t take things at face value...” And they’re right! Jesus does NOT take things on appearances. He really DOES know the truth about the Pharisees – and you! – and me! – because He can see right through the mask – right past the pretty face that we put on for church or anytime we want to impress God, or anyone else for that matter...

These men ask their seemingly simple question about paying taxes, and Jesus, aware of their malice, calls them “Hypocrites” – “2-faced!” Right?

I mean, isn’t that what a hypocrite is – someone who wears two faces, a true face they want to keep hidden, and another face that they want you to see?

Well, Jesus knows the ugly face of sin when He sees it. And as this ugly assortment pointed out themselves, "Jesus is NOT 'swayed by appearances'"

but knows that He is now dealing with the face of evil, the face of Satan writ large over this brood of vipers who bear the ugly sin of their fathers, and of their fathers' fathers before them all the way back to Adam. And Jesus knows that if He tells them not to pay the tax, He may be branded a traitor by Caesar. But if He tells them to pay the tax, He will come off as a traitor to His people.

And so, aware of their malice (v18) in what appears to be a lose-lose situation, Jesus tells them to show Him the coin for the tax - a denarius - and He asks them, "Whose face and name do you see here? Whose likeness and inscription is this (v20)?" And of course, the coin is stamped with Caesar's face and name, right? It is the coin of the realm, which means it belongs to Caesar. And if he wants it, it's his to take. "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's..." And as

disappointed as you may be to hear this, Jesus is telling you, "Yes - pay your taxes." You are a citizen of two kingdoms - the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. And whether you're Jew or a Gentile, a member of the church or not, if your money has a picture of Caesar on it, give it back to Caesar. If it has a picture of Washington, don't be foolish - send it to Washington when they ask for it back. It's really not yours to keep, and things will probably go badly if you don't nod along with this...

But what about that second piece of advice - that bit about rendering to God the things that are God's? If we are to give back to Caesar those things that bear his name and image, what can we possibly render to God that would allow us to live under Him in His kingdom? What do we have in and of ourselves that

bears the name and image of God? Well, the answer is nothing... Because we're bankrupt! We no longer bear the image of God is our fallen human nature.

True, we had it in the beginning, because God *created* us in His Image. He made us holy and righteous, beautiful in His sight and perfect in every way. But the moment our

first father and mother began investing in the currency of Satan's lies, all was lost. The moment Adam and Eve were no longer content to render themselves in obedience to the perfect relationship of fear, love, and trust in God for which they were created, they gave themselves over to the ugliness of sin – to the lust for control, the desire for absolute independence, and the delusion they could have paradise on their terms apart from God and His Word. And when they did, the image of God in man was destroyed.

And so it remains to this very day. Because from that time forward, every person born into this world has inherited the ugly face of our fallen mother and father – the ugly face of sin that can no longer be rendered to God. We are now enemies of God, unwilling and unable to pay the tax, unable to render back the image of His perfection that He demands of each and every one of us if we are to have life in His Kingdom. We simply do not have it to give.

Nope... There is only one Man who could pay that – only one Man after the fall who bore the perfect image of God in Himself – and that man is Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) as St. Paul writes, rendered Himself to God in the way that only He could. Jesus alone was able to render what God demanded for life in His Kingdom: perfect obedience in life, perfect obedience even to death on the cross.

Jesus paid the price – His was the acceptable sacrifice – And now, was raised again from the dead, He has been rendered back to God by His ascension into heaven.

And you know what? He didn't do it for Himself... He did it for you! For by offering Himself into death on the cross, Jesus rendered Himself to God in payment for your sin and for the sin of the whole world. By taking the ugly face of your sin to the cross, He opened the way for YOU to be rendered back to God. How? By *giving* you the face you need – by *making* you a new coin in the realm, if you will – by *restoring* you to the Image of God, the image by which YOU are now rendered to Him, holy and righteous in His sight. In the water of Holy Baptism, Jesus minted you a new creation.

He re-generated you – re-genesised you through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7). He gave you the face of perfection once again, and He put His inscription on you: “The Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” He poured out His righteousness for you, taking away your sin and clothing you with Himself – with His face – His image – His perfection for your life and salvation.

And as we come back to the question, “What shall we render to the Lord,” we find a simple “thank you” will do! For you already have been rendered to God, not in the currency of gold or silver, but in the holy, precious blood of Christ crucified and risen. And taking our cue from Psalm 116, we now offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. We come for the gifts God gives and take the cup of salvation that He pours for you here today. We gather in the courts of the Lord’s house and in the presence of His people, and we present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1), which is our spiritual worship. For the price has been paid, and we have indeed been rendered to God for life everlasting – In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Matthew 22:15-22.