Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Pentecost 21A - Proper 24A

October 18, 2026

Matthew 22:15-22

Plotting to Trap Jesus

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his talk. . . . “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” . . . Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” (Matthew 22:15, 21 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

“Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk.” When was this? Just after Jesus had spoken the parable of the wedding banquet which we heard last week. Jesus had spoken of the wedding feast and how one can be found worthy of staying in the wedding banquet. The answer was to be clothed with Christ, thereby demonstrating love and living out the baptismal life of faith.

Such talk angered the Pharisees. So, plotting how they might entangle Jesus in a web of deception, they decide that it would be good to send some of their disciples with the Herodians. By sending some of their disciples, the deception would seem less evident. Such disciples would come off as curious and in need of instruction. Their hope was that Jesus would see this as an opportunity to straighten out some misguided future Pharisees.

In order to entrap Jesus, they sent along the “Herodians”, followers and supporters of Herod the Tetrarch. If they could just bait Jesus into using this as a teaching moment for the disciples, then the Herodians would be there to catch Jesus in sedition and have him killed by

the Roman government. What a difficult situation to be in. No matter how Jesus answers, He is either going to come off as rebelling against the Roman government which will cause His arrest or He is going to speak against the Old Testament and incite the anger of the Jewish people which will cause a whole different set of problems.

So, these disciples of the Pharisees use flattery to get Jesus to open up. “Teacher we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of men.”

They ask, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” They’re trying to get Jesus to speak frankly and openly. They are trying to see if Jesus will uphold the Mosaic covenant, but they also regard Jesus as a rebel king. It seems to have been a common thought in those days that Jesus would be a political king who would lead Israel to great domination by worldly standards.

Jesus, knowing their wickedness, calls them hypocrites and seeks to find a denarius. He then tells them to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. We know what belongs to the government: pay your taxes and obey the laws of the land. Paul says it well in Romans 13, “For the governing authorities are God's servants to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's servant, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake.” (Rom. 13:4-5).

“Show me the tax money.” Jesus subtly points out that it is these Jewish students who have themselves given in to Rome and have accepted them against the Mosaic covenant. What is more, is that one who knew his Old Testament would also realize that the very presence and rule of the pagan Romans is the declaration of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God with the punishment being that of being ruled by a pagan government.

In the Lord’s answer is the recognition that there are things that belong to the world and there are things that belong to God. His answer even hints that the Jews shouldn’t be worried about money. Only the pagans go after such vanity. Caesar wants his money...so, give it to him. But, what is the Lord’s is meant to stay with the Lord. So, what is the Lord’s? After all, God certainly has no use for tax money.

He does want your heart, though. Even more, He wants your soul. And more than that, God wants every part of you to belong to Him. The Lord desires that your heart goes upward to Him in love. He wants your mind on Him and on the mysteries of the holy scriptures. St. Paul speaks aptly of the Christian: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

What is God’s is your life and your praise and honor to Him. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The whole plan of the Pharisees backfired because Jesus condemned them for allowing the Romans in and He let Caesar have what was his.

Furthermore, Jesus, in a marvelous and brilliant way, taught those sent to Him something very important. In fact, they marveled at what Jesus had said and went their way. The world isn't any different today. The rulers of the world want the worldly things and Christians are trying to understand how to live in this world without being held captive to it.

We look at our world today and we see the government’s mounting debt, and ever-higher taxes and prices on almost everything, which leaves less money in our pockets. We become disgruntled and angry at those at the top who have mismanaged funds, yet continue to get richer. If we are not careful, the world’s problems could consume us. Ironically, this happened with the Pharisees.

They became more interested in and concerned with the world’s affairs, yet less engrossed in God’s. The sad result brought by this shift in focus was that they couldn’t even spot the Messiah who had come, which the holy scriptures had prophesied and promised would come. The world can have its ways and means, so long as God has you.

For you were bought at a hefty price. There is a spiritual debt that God the Father required of each of us and it was punishment and payment for sin. But it is God Himself who made the payment. Jesus Christ, hung upon a tree, the cross at Golgotha, shed His blood,

making the payment for the sins of the world. An incredible and insurmountable debt of its own, but spiritual, the love of God was made known by the giving up of His Son for your life.

God gained access to the hearts, minds, souls, of the entire human race through the death of His Son. Through Holy Baptism, you became God's own child, and He gave you His Holy Spirit as a guarantee of this payment and ransom. Caesar can have that metal denarius. It shall perish with him. But, you God wants to keep. Feeding you in the holy supper, the Lord bids you to live in Him, to die in Him, and to live in Him. When? When the Lord speaks, then Christians are brought to life and kept there for eternity. Then the world may continue on its worries of things perishable, but you shall be made imperishable.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s?” The world means to take, but when God says to give, He means simply to receive. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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