

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost A
Incarnation Lutheran Church

WHOSE IMAGE?

YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT A COUPLE SUNDAYS AGO THE GOSPEL TEXTS FROM MATTHEW MOVED US INTO WHAT WE NOW CALL HOLY WEEK. THE TENSION BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IS COMING TO A HEAD. THE TENSION BETWEEN THE CROWDS WHO ARE FOLLOWING JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS ALSO IS COMING TO A HEAD. FOR THE CROWDS, JESUS MAY WELL BE THE PROMISED MESSIAH. FOR THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, HE IS A THREAT...A THORN IN THEIR SIDE, IF YOU WILL, THAT MUST BE REMOVED. BUT REMOVED.... OH SO CAREFULLY AS NOT TO CREATE HAVOC AMONG THOSE CROWDS. AND IN TODAY'S GOSPEL TEXT THEY ARE SURE THEY HAVE HIM.

IT'S AN INTERESTING GROUP THAT APPROACHES JESUS THIS DAY. THERE ARE THE HERODIANS. NOT MUCH

IS KNOWN ABOUT THEM BUT THAT THEY ARE A PRO-ROMAN JEWISH SECT - A PRIESTLY SECT AND A POLITICAL PARTY IF YOU WILL - WHICH SUPPORTS THE RIGHTS OF HEROD THE GREAT'S SONS TO RULE PALESTINE. WITH THEM ARE THE PHARISEES, LAY PEOPLE DEVOTED TO THE STUDY AND OBEDIENCE OF THE TORAH - THEIR HOLY SCRIPTURES - THE FIRST 5 BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. THEY RESENT THE ROMAN OCCUPATION - SEE IT AS A NECESSARY EVIL BUT SUBMIT TO ROME'S RULE AS LONG AS ROME DOESN'T INTERFERE WITH THEIR PRACTICE OF RELIGION....HERODIANS AND PHARISEES...TWO GROUPS WHO OTHERWISE WOULD BE AT ODDS WITH ONE ANOTHER - NOW UNITED BEHIND THE ONE CAUSE ON WHICH THEY AGREE: THIS JESUS OF NAZARETH IS A PROBLEM THAT MUST GO AWAY. AND AS I SAID THEY ARE SURE THEY HAVE FOUND JUST THE THING THAT WILL DESTROY HIM.

THEY APPROACH JESUS AND ASK HIM A QUESTION: "IS IT LAWFUL TO PAY TAXES TO THE EMPEROR, OR NOT?" NOW, THAT QUESTION IS MORE LOADED THAT APPEARS ON THE SURFACE. PALESTINE, YOU REMEMBER , IS UNDER THE RULE OF ROME. AND ROME IS A RUTHLESS EMPIRE. SO, IN ADDITION TO THE TEMPLE TAX WHICH ALL JEWS MUST PAY, THEY ARE SUBJECTED TO EXCESSIVE TAXING BY ROME - A LAND TAX, A GRAIN TAX, A POLL TAX - PLACED ON EVERY JEWISH MALE AGES 12 -65 (THAT'S WHY JOSEPH AND MARY WERE GOING TO BETHLEHEM) AND AN IMPERIAL TAX. THE JEWS ANNUALLY WERE REQUIRED TO PAY A DENARIUS (ABOUT ONE DAY'S WAGES) TO ROME TO SUPPORT ROME'S OCCUPATION OF THEIR LAND. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WERE REQUIRED TO SUPPORT THEIR OWN OPPRESSORS. AND THEY WERE REQUIRED TO DO THAT WITH A SPECIALLY MINTED COIN...A COIN THAT HAD THE IMAGE

OF CAESAR ON ONE SIDE AND AN INSCRIPTION THAT READ LIKE THIS ON THE OTHER SIDE: "TIBERIUS CAESAR, AUGUST SON OF THE DIVINE AUGUSTUS, HIGH PRIEST." WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE HERODIANS, YOU CAN IMAGINE THE ANGER OF THE JEWS AT THIS TAX AND AT THIS COIN....A COIN WHICH NAMES CAESAR DIVINE. A COIN WHICH CAUSES THEM TO COMMIT BLASPHEMY AGAINST GOD EVERYTIME THEY USE IT.

SO, IF JESUS SAYS YES TO THEIR QUESTION HE IS GIVING HIS ALLEGIANCE NOT ONLY TO ROME BUT ACKNOWLEDGING CAESAR AS DIVINE – AND THE CROWDS WOULD SURELY TURN AGAINST HIM AND HIS BLASPHEMY. AND IF HE SAYS NO, HE IS DEFYING ROME AND ROME WILL CHARGE HIM WITH SEDITION. "SO, JESUS, DO WE PAY THE IMPERIAL TAX OR NOT?"

"GIVE ME A COIN, YOU HYPOCRITES." JESUS SAYS. (YOU MIGHT NOTE THAT THEY HAVE ONE HANDY!)

“WHOSE IMAGE IS ON THE COIN? “ “THE EMPERORS!”
“GIVE TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE HIS – AND TO GOD
THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S.”

NOW, DO YOU KNOW WHAT PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE
IMMEDIATELY WOULD HAVE COME TO THE MIND OF
EVERY FAITHFUL JEW LISTENING TO THIS EXCHANGE? IT’S
FROM GENESIS...FROM THE CREATION STORY: “THEN GOD
SAID, ‘LET US MAKE HUMANKIND IN OUR IMAGE,
ACCORDING TO OUR LIKENESS....SO GOD CREATED
HUMANKIND IN HIS IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE
CREATED THEM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM.”

GIVE TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR’S –
AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S. “GIVE THE
COIN TO CAESAR,” JESUS SAYS, “IN THE END IT IS
WORTHLESS. BUT GIVE TO GOD THAT WHICH BEARS
GOD’S IMAGE – AND THAT IS YOU – AND ALL THAT YOU
HAVE. GIVE YOURSELF - YOUR HEART, YOU MIND , YOUR

SOUL - TO GOD." NO WONDER THEY WERE AMAZED. NO WONDER THEY WALKED AWAY.

YOU KNOW, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE NOTICED, BUT I HAVE. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MOVING AMONG US HERE AT ZION IN AN ALMOST HUMOROUS WAY. WE NEED 91 PEOPLE TO VOTE ON ONE SERVICE OR TWO - AND 87 SHOW UP. NO VOTE HAPPENS BUT A POWERFUL AND HEALING CONVERSATION TAKES PLACE. AND WE MOVE FORWARD NOW - FOCUSED HOW TO BE GOOD DISCIPLES IN THIS TIME AND IN THIS PLACE RATHER THAN WASTING OUR ENERGY ON THAT WHICH IS NOT AS IMPORTANT. AND NOW TODAY, THIS GOSPEL TEXT APPEARS ON THE VERY DAY OF OUR MINISTRY TEAM FAIR AND OUR CALL TO GIVE TO GOD - TIME, GIFTS, AND MONEY - THOSE THINGS THAT GOD HAS FIRST GIVEN US. AND WE ARE REMINDED- BY TODAY'S GOSPEL TEXT - AS MIGHTILY AS THE SPIRIT CAN MOVE -

**THAT WE BEAR THE IMAGE OF GOD IN OUR VERY BEING
AND THAT ALL WE HAVE BELONGS TO GOD.**

**I WANT TO ASK YOU TO DO TWO THINGS. FIRST OF
ALL, HOLD THE TIME AND TALENT SHEET IN YOUR HAND
AND LOOK AT ALL THE OPORTUNITIES THERE ARE HERE
AT ZION FOR YOU TO GIVE TO GOD AND GOD'S WORK
THROUGH THIS CONGREGATION. PONDER FOR A MOMENT
THE GIFTS YOU, A CHLD OF GOD, CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE
AND MARKED WITH THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND SEALED BY
THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BAPTISM - CONSIDER ALL THE GIFTS
YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AND THEN PRAYERFULLY
CONSIDER HOW GOD IS CALLING YOU TO USE THOSE GIFTS.
NOW - MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS OVER THE
PAPER.....TO REMIND YOU OF WHOSE AND WHO YOU ARE
AS YOU OFFER THESE GIFTS BACK TO GOD AND GOD'S
WORK HERE AT ZION..**

AND NOW, THE SECOND REQUEST - A HARDER ONE. I WANT YOU TO TAKE OUT A CREDIT CARD. IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE WITH YOU, A DOLLAR BILL, OR EVEN A COIN WILL DO. LOOK AT IT. PONDER ALL THAT CARD MEANS TO YOU. AND THEN, CONSIDER, PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER, HOW ALL WE ARE AND ALL WE HAVE IS GOD'S - INCLUDING OUR MONEY. NOW, MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS OVER THAT CREDIT CARD....REMEMBERING THAT HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY OUTSIDE THESE WALLS AND HOW WE GIVE OUR MONEY HERE - INSIDE THESE WALLS - TO GOD'S MISSION HERE AT ZION - REFLECTS WHO AND WHOSE WE ARE AS WE OFFER OUR MONEY BACK TO GOD.

A STORY ABOUT THE BUCKET

SO, DO WE HAVE TO GIVE IT ALL? YES....AND WE SO WE PRAY...MERCIFUL FATHER, WE OFFER WITH JOY AND THANKSGIVING WHAT YOU HAVE FIRST GIVEN US - OUR SELVES, OUR TIME, AND OUR POSSESSIONS, SIGNS OF

**YOUR GRACIOUS LOVE. RECEIVE THEM FOR THE SAKE OF
HIM WHO OFFERED HIMSELF FOR US, JESUS CHRIST OUR
LORD. AMEN.**