

**Ps 99; Ex 33:12-23; 1 Th 1:1-10; Mt 22:15-22
10-22-17 – The Things that Are God’s**

Out of Matthew’s Gospel, we have heard many parables of Jesus (note bulletin insert). The discourse from about chapter 19 until now has been the disputation between the church leaders and Jesus. As Matthew tells the story, we see that the noose is tightening. These religious leaders – in fact they are political leaders as well – have Herod Agrippa’s go-ahead to murder this rabbi from Nazareth. But, Jesus hasn’t given up on them. He continues to give sound teaching. He continues to love them, even as they plot His death.

The various parties, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians have thought up theological tests to trip Jesus up. The parables in this long discourse are warnings and teachings for these religious leaders. They won’t hurt you and me either. Back, in Mt 4 – Jesus was in the desert being tormented by Satan. At that time, He quoted Moses (Dt 8:3) saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Do we wish

only to be affirmed – but not corrected? Will we accept only the sweet, and not the bitter? I’m just asking. This is a correcting word.

It is a good thing to read the Scripture. I encourage you to keep at it. It is a much deeper thing, and more humbling (and more profitable) to allow the Scripture to read you. Next week, we will return to the Beautiful Attitudes (Mt 5:1-10) on All Saints Sunday. This Word – this glory in our midst – can transform us and fill us – with the power of God’s holy love today – right now. I do not refer to the object made of paper, bound in leather. I speak of the living presence of Jesus Christ. And where Jesus is, there is the Creator God, and where Father and Son are, there is the Holy Spirit. Here and now, in the midst of a believing people. God shows up. **It’s a God thing.**

Moses, the great Patriarch, is asking God for a manifestation of His holy presence (our Exodus passage). Moses basically says, “If You aren’t going with us, don’t even send us to this Promised Land.” Moses wishes God to guarantee that Israel will always be in God’s presence. God

says, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Church, God’s word is as trustworthy today as it was then (e. 13th c. BC). There is no treasure so great as God’s promise never to leave us or forsake us. This was ours long before the cross of Christ. It just gets better. I speak of treasure laid up in heaven. It will not tarnish, rust or rot. Better than much fine gold. **How can you put a price tag on the things of God?** You can’t.

Another servant of God, the Apostle Paul (1400 years later), is writing to the church at Thessalonica that they are in his prayers. He rejoices that he knows they are beloved by God, and chosen by God. Paul’s evidence of this is that, “our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction...” (1 Th 1:4-5) God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – has been with them and has manifested His power in them. **The things that are God’s are recognizable as God’s.** And the reputation of the church at Thessalonica has spread far beyond their own province. Such a reputation is true wealth! It stands apart from the things of the world.

It is Jesus who makes the real distinction between the things of God and the things of Caesar. The leaders of Judah hated the poll tax imposed by Rome. It had to be paid annually per person just because the people were there in their own country. It could not be paid in the temple shekel, the official Jewish money. No, it had to be paid in Roman coin – bearing the likeness of Caesar and all kinds of references to his divine nature and his role as savior of the people.

The Pharisees and Herodians (Herod's party, we assume) wanted to bring charges against Jesus. Seditious against the government would be a serious charge. So, they tempt the Lord Jesus to speak against this unpopular tax. We know Jesus preached against thinking and behaving as the pagans do. One hallmark of the Gospel is that it is counter-cultural.

His questioners were disappointed with His answer. But, we can be delighted to hear our Lord speak up for allegiance to the kingdom of God. If the denarius "belongs" to Caesar, we pay

him just that – the tax we owe. Then, all our devotion and honor and praise belong to God. All our faith and trust are in our Creator.

In fact, Jesus teaches us that when we begin to follow Him, we relinquish our worship of the values of the worldly empire: more pleasure, more money, more power. These are the things that are Caesar's. We can pay our taxes and be at peace.

Here is a genuine, clear teaching. It is not a parable or veiled statement. **All** things belong to God. **All** things were fashioned out of Divine Love. And the Creator of Life offers us Life in His sacrifice. We inherit His victory over death and we receive Life in the presence of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.