

Advent Devotional December 4, 2021

Scripture

Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "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. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Devotional

Rev. Beth Creekpau '10

For many who read this, we find ourselves reading from an American context. We have been given immense freedoms through our system of government, but often as a Church we have had trouble distinguishing between faith in God and patriotism. Often when we talk about missions, we worry about syncretism, the mixing of the Christian faith with local people's beliefs, but the American church is far from immune from the sin of its own patriotic syncretism.

In this story, the Pharisees are trying to set up a false dichotomy. They are trying to trick Jesus into renouncing the kingdom of Caesar to his detriment. But Jesus knew what they were up to. He also knew that although we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are also resident aliens in the places we call home here and now.

Jesus reminds us that we do owe things to our country. We do owe our respect. We do owe our money and resources. Maybe we owe our vote or our public service. But our heart? Our ultimate allegiance? Nope. These belong to God and God alone.

In this time of Advent, we remember not only that Jesus came, but that he will return. In the same way, we remember our earthly duty—but we cannot ever forget that our allegiance belongs to the Kingdom of God. Advent is a time of preparation for the return of Christ, so it is a good opportunity for self-examination. Does my heart belong to God alone? Is this reflected in the way I spend my time, my talent, and my treasure? And at the same time, do I respect the authority of the government (even those I disagree with)?

Do I honor God with the way I submit to God's lordship *and* earthly laws?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, may I always keep my eyes on you. May I receive my identity in the Kingdom of God. Where I need to remove allegiances or add earthly duty, help me O God. Forgive me and lead me on this Advent path with the promise of your return that will set all things right. Amen.