

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s”

We had some Christian friends staying this week - I asked them for some thoughts on today’s Gospel and all their comments revolved around tax !! I don’t want to talk about tax; it brought to mind Benjamin Franklin’s comment (USA Founding Father) = there are two certainties in life, tax & death. Not that paying tax is bad, in fact it’s good, the issue can be the amount we pay and how it’s used.

In Today’s Gospel the tax in question was to pay for the occupying Roman Army and the coin shown to Jesus for paying the tax was a denarius. Note; this coin is mentioned in Matthew 20, parable of the parable of Landowner & workers: a denarius was a day’s wage, it was also the daily wage of an ordinary Roman soldier.

Being a Roman coin it had the head of Tiberius Caesar on one side and on the reverse a Latin inscription: *‘Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of **divine Augustus**’* = blasphemy to the Jews. Note: when Jesus overturned the money changers tables in the Temple, they would be changing Roman coins into acceptable Temple coinage...for a profit.

The officials challenging Jesus, the Pharisees (traditionalists) and Herodians (quizzlings), were enemies but united in their desire to trap Jesus. Jesus called them “hypocrites!” (Greek hupocrisis = *actors/pretenders*) were pretending to ask a question to which they knew the answer.

Jesus’ answer: give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and **give to God what is God’s!**

Here is the challenge for us: *What can/do we give to God?*

1) What can we give to God who has everything, owns everything and is everything ?
What does God want from us ?

In a few days time I shall reach the dizzy heights of 76. When asked about presents I really don’t need anything, I am content but I would like to be with my Family, those I love.

This is what God wants from YOU & me, he loves us warts and all, i.e. the good bits & bad bits.

There is a verse in Deuteronomy (7:7) which I love: God is speaking to Israel

“The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples... But it was because the Lord loved you....”

God loves us and He wants us back, whatever state we’re in God wants us.

How can we be sure? Well, think about it....

a) Genesis 1 - When God created it was good and then, three chapters later in Genesis 3 we have what theologians call ‘the Fall’ - God’s creation is messed up: eternity is turned to mortality and our eternal love and fellowship with God is replaced with greed, jealousy, killing etc - human nature as we know it. However, this didn’t stop God because He wants us to come back home...

b) Jesus/God has come to us: *“God loved the world so much that He gave us His only Son...”*
affirming God’s desire to bring us back to himself.

c) today, his call still stands: through his Holy Spirit God continues to search for those lost to Him

Remember Jesus’ message in the parables of Prodigal Son, Lost Sheep, Lost Coin: God is searching for us and calling us to come home

So, what can we give to God? What does God want? He wants US!

Note Christiana Rossetti’s carol: ‘In the bleak midwinter..’

“What can I give him, poor as I am, if I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb, if I were a wise man I would do my part, yet what can I give Him, give Him my heart.”

2) When this happens, there is something else God wants...

Look at what happened when the Prodigal son returned home: a robe (clothed by his father), a ring (restored as a son), sandals (regains his dignity through the father's love) = **restoration**

The irony is that as we give ourselves back to God He gives us new clothes.. etc, restores our lives, adopts us as his children enabling us to serve Him.....

....e.g. the fishermen Peter, James + were sent out to be 'Fishers of people'; Zacchaeus went out and paid back all he owed; the demoniac sent off home to share his good news from God; Simeon's house and the prostitute's tears on Jesus feet, giving him her love.

When we go out for God.... we are Giving to God. Consider the following

A) Our worship & praise together today = right now we are opening our hearts and offering our love to God. When we leave here let us learn to continue thanking & praising God in the everyday things e.g. Grace at meals... a car journey.. thanks for the gift of a new day...

B) Our service to God - this could be things we do in our church life but most of life is outside of church activities: helping a neighbour, that phone call or visit, writing a letter, any simple act of kindness....

Years ago Rody and I were in a queue at Tesco. On the opposite side an old lady was taking stuff out of her trolley at the checkout because the bill was too large. I should have gone round and paid her bill, I could have afforded it, instead I let my embarrassment stop me. It was a missed opportunity from God to serve - I learned my lesson. Rody and I have also learned from you, here at St Andrews, in your support for the Food Bank. Thank you for your example, which Rody and I have now joined.

Do you remember the poor widow woman in the Temple who gave only 2 tiny copper coins? We can show our love for God by serving him in the smallest of acts. It brings joy to God's heart.

C) What I call Surgery Time - private time with God to listen and grow your heart. This is time spent with God and you, no one else - private time with God.

***prayer - however you do it** - I know someone who prays in the shower because it's the only undisturbed time in her day; also someone who prays when doing the washing-up or ironing.

***reading the Bible** - find a version you can understand - Rody and I listen to DAVID SUCHET reading a passage every morning. Why is it that we don't make time to read a little passage each day? Once Christians were known as "People of the Book".

Remember the Mars Bar ad: "*A psalm a day helps us rest, work and pray*" (= my version)

***everyday events of life** = the good and the bad. We can bring our pain, our tears as well as joys in private to God.

Surgery Time with God is for our spiritual health and the healing of our hearts & souls.

Conclusion. What does God want from us? Listen to God speaking in Isaiah 58:

'...If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.'

I'd like to end with the lovely prayer of David used by Michael last week:

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you."

Lord, you have given us so much, teach us how we can give back to you. Amen.