

## **Missional Stewardship of God's Resources**

2017-10-08 - Year A - Pentecost 10-18 - The Rev. Christopher Klukas

Isaiah 45:1-7; Psalm 96; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

- Would you rather book. Gives people two equally unappealing options and asks them to choose which one they would rather endure.

### **Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's**

- In our Gospel passage today, we see Jesus in a conversation with the Pharisees and the Herodians.
  - Pharisees were religious purists. Strict keepers of the law.
  - Herodians were likely courtiers of Herod who was placed in power in the Roman province of Judea as a kind of governor. Thus he was a representative of Caesar.
- The "tax" in question was a "head tax" or "census tax". There were other types of taxes, like on the sale of goods, but this was the main Roman tax and it was paid directly to Caesar. This was one of the main reminders that the Jews were living under occupation.
- The tax had to be paid with a denarius, the coin which is presented to Jesus when he says "show me the coin." There were two problems with this as far as the Pharisees were concerned.
  - The image on the coin was in violation of the second commandment. *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."* (Exodus 20:4, ESV)
  - The coin had a blasphemous inscription which referred to Caesar being divine.
- The Herodians fully supported the tax because they were supporters of Herod whose power came directly from Caesar.
- Jesus was in a bind, but he gives them an answer that no one could have anticipated.
  - V. 20-22 - In this somewhat ambiguous answer, Jesus avoids the trap that the Pharisees and Herodians were trying to put him in.
  - The word "give" or "render" has more of a connotation of "give back" or "return."
  - I think it is clear from this passage that we have a responsibility to pay to the government whatever taxes we owe, but what is it that we are to return to God?

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- When Jesus asks whose "portrait" is on the coin. The greek word he uses is "eikon."
  - This is the same word that was used in the greek translation of the OT in Genesis 1:26-27. We are the bearers of the Image of God.
- If the tax is due to Caesar because it bears his image, what does that mean for us?
  - All that we are and all that we have belongs to God.
- God gave us dominion over his creation (Genesis 1:28). This means that God intends for us to help him rule over his creation.
- Another word to use for this role is stewardship.

- Steward: “one employed in a large household or estate to manage domestic concerns (such as the supervision of servants, collection of rents, and keeping of accounts)”<sup>1</sup> The steward doesn’t own the resources, his role is to manage someone else’s resources.
- We don’t own any of the resources that God has blessed us with. Rather, he intends for us to manage those resources on his behalf, according to his will.

### **How much should I return to the Lord?**

- From the founding of the people of Israel right down to the present, the Biblical standard of giving has been the tithe (which means a tenth or 10%).
  - Abraham gives a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20).
  - Jacob makes a vow to God saying: “...of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.” (Genesis 28:22, ESV)
  - God commands the people of Israel in the law to give a tenth of all produce and all animals back to the Lord. (Leviticus 27:30-32)
  - In the book of Malachi the Lord speaks to the people and accuses them of robbing him by neglecting to give tithes and contributions (Malachi 3:8-10).
  - Jesus accuses the Pharisees of giving tithes but neglecting the weightier matters of the Law. “These you ought to have done without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23).
- The tithe is the starting point. You can also give beyond the tithe and we call this an “offering” or a “contribution”. Malachi mentions both tithes and contributions.
  - Rick Warren was blessed with such abundances from the sale of his books that he decided to give a reverse tithe, giving 90% and living off of just 10%.
  - If you are not already tithing, and it seems overwhelming to you to begin, try to work up to it, increasing your gift a little each year until you get to 10% or more.
  - This is what your vestry is doing with the Church’s contributions beyond the parish. Currently we give a little more than 7% but we are working our way towards at least 10%.
  - Let me also encourage you by saying that the thought of tithing once overwhelmed Carrie and I as well, but we committed to doing it early in our marriage and God has always been faithful to provide us with what we need.
- Tithing is a blessing to us.
  - 10% of income is a large portion of your budget, and it is just large enough to be a tangible reminder that all you have belongs to God.
    - I had a job that came with lots of fun equipment, and I had to keep reminding myself that none of it belonged to me!
  - Money can be a dangerous idol in our lives. In our consumer culture, we are programmed to always be wanting more. Tithing is an invitation to be content.
  - Tithing is also an invitation to participate in God’s provision.
    - Bp. Stanway story.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/steward>

## **Stewardship for 2018**

- Stewardship letters will go out this year with the theme: Missional Stewardship of God's Resources.
  - Please read the letter, spend time in God's word reflecting on your giving, and Pray, asking God how much he wants you to give this year.
  - We will return our pledge cards on Sunday, November 5 as an act of worship during the services that day.
- Please also remember, as we mentioned last week at the Annual Meeting, that right now our expenses have exceeded our income by a little more than \$20,000.
  - The vestry take the stewardship of the Church's finances very seriously and we have spent less than was budgeted, but our income hasn't been as high as predicted.
  - Please continue to be faithful in fulfilling your pledges from last year.
  - Please also pray about whether God is calling you to make a special end of the year contribution to help us end in the black.