

Pentecost 23, 2008  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
Matthew 22: 15 – 22

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is asked a question about money. And He answers the question all right, but in such a way as to make us think, that money may NOT be the real issue here after all. There might be something here that actually matters to God, more than the money. What Jesus famously said was, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but render unto God what is God's," and we are left to ask, what is God's anyway? What is it He wants from us, what is it we are called, to "render" unto Him?

We'll think on that today; and we'll begin with prayer:

Heavenly Father, all good gifts come from your loving hand. We thank you for your mercy, and pray now only for a faith that trusts you in all things, and that willingly follows where you lead, all the days of our lives; Jesus in your name, AMEN.

In Psalm 50, verse 9, we read the following: "The Lord says, I don't want your bull." I, don't want, your bull, kind of an interesting thing for God to say, don't you think, and I'm sure He means it; it wouldn't hurt however to read the rest of the Psalm as well. What God says in Psalm 50 as a whole, to Old Testament people who were accustomed to making animal sacrifices, God says "I don't want your bull, because I don't need your bull—why would I need a bull from you people anyway? The whole herd is mine, as a matter of fact the whole earth is mine! Why would I want some token animal offering from you, when everything you see was made by me and belongs to me? I don't want your bull," God says in Psalm 50. "I want you—heart and mind, body and soul. I want you, and your faith your love your commitment—not your tokens."

A similar lesson is presented to us in the Gospel lesson for today, Matthew chapter 22. Here's this chunk of change the government wants from us, said the Pharisees. Here's this wad of cash we're supposed to render unto Caesar—well, should we? Wouldn't it be more *godly* somehow to take this money and render it to the Lord instead? Well, listen, says Jesus. Nice thought. Nice thought. But ask yourself, does God really need your money? The whole world is His, the riches of heaven are His, so do you think God is looking for a little cash advance from you? What does God really want from you anyway? Not some token, that's for sure. What God wants, again, is

you—heart and mind, body and soul. Faith love commitment life—not some small token now and then. But your whole life.

When we turn in the church to the question of money, I want to be clear: This is not some sort of glorified fund raising appeal. You deal with fundraisers all the time, in school, and there are solicitations through the mail as well as over the phone—you deal with fundraisers all the time. This is not fundraising. This is simply asking the question, What is it that God wants from you in life, anyway? Remembering all that the Father has done for you—including little things like, oh, I don't know, forgiveness of sin, life and salvation through Jesus Christ who died and rose again—remembering what your Heavenly Father has done for you. What is God looking for from you now? A check once a week? A couple of bucks in the plate?—don't you wish. Don't you wish, that would be easy. You could mail it in, and never give it a second thought. No, the God who gave you life, wants your life. The God who literally gave you the time of day wants your time in return, the God who gave you energy and strength wants your best effort in return. The God who gave you life, wants your life, and He will not settle for less. Certainly He will not settle, for tokenism.

So for example, the sin in your life. Nice that you apologized for it again today, page 77 in the green book. But is a token apology once a week what God is looking for from you? Really? You have confessed your sins—tell me, do you honestly have any intention, of changing. Do you really mean to turn your life over to God, so that tomorrow is not just another sad sorry repeat of yesterday? That would be what God is looking for—your heart of hearts, your honest commitment, your today and your tomorrow—not just another, token apology.

The way you spend your time. You have good intentions, you have neighbors in need, you have a church and a community crying out for willing workers. But then you also have ESPN, and a variety of worthy reasons and excuses, do you think God needs your good intentions? Do you think a couple random acts of niceness every now and then is a true and worthy response to the God who has given you everything? Or is it rather the case once again, that we'd rather give a

token, than ourselves.

Your whole Christian faith. The Christian faith if nothing else is a pleasant way to spend an hour or two on Sunday morning—glad you're here, hope you enjoy it—is this it? Is taking up space in the pew what God is looking for from you? Every moment of every day, God is with you, to forgive and guide and help and sustain, what. We're going to give Him an hour a week and call it a deal? Again, God wants your life, not your tokens.

And yes, your money. In the Gospel lesson for today Jesus does not excuse us from putting an offering in the plate. Instead He asks you to ask yourself, Am I really making an offering here? Am I really giving of myself here, or am I giving what I know I don't need? Is this an offering of first fruits, or just my leftovers, is this money going into the plate a sign that my whole life belongs to the Lord Jesus? Or is it one more example of tokenism, one more attempt to *avoid* giving God my life, and to find instead the easy way out.

We are Christians today, gathered in this place, because the Lord Jesus never once took the easy way out. He never once was content to offer us or the world a token miracle, or a random act of mercy—instead He gave His life. His whole life, He died on a cross of all things to forgive us, then rose from the dead to save us—He gave His whole life, for you. And He now calls for your whole life, in return. We do not have a token Savior. Let us with the help of God not be content to be token people, but instead come to respond wholeheartedly, to the Lord our maker and redeemer, in whose name we pray, AMEN.