

The Meaning of Money

Scripture Reading - Hear now this wonderful word.....where the Lord of Creation....works wonders in human amazement....on the common matter...of mammon. Money. Reading now from Matthew 22, verses 15 through 22.

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So 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. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" 21 They 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."

22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Here ends this reading wherein Jesus turns away wrath....and shows us...ourselves.....as in a mirror.

And Jesus said, "Show me the money."

You can find it in today's gospel reading.

Actually, he said, "Show me the coin."

So - to get into our text, let's talk about coins.

Our... first national coin was minted in 1776, authorized by the Continental Congress. Benjamin Franklin provided the basic design of that pewter dollar, inscribed with the word *fugio*— Latin for "I fly." This word was paired with an image of a sundial, to depict how "time flies." Franklin must have anticipated how money would ☺ ...fly out of our hands some day.

The coin also bears the odd phrase, "Mind your business." What's that about? Sage advice to those in business? The words of a cranky mint worker? Hard to say but, what's clear isthis sassy slogan has not hurt the coin's value. A Continental Dollar is now worth\$1,500 !

..... Look at a typical American coin today, and you'll see the words *E Pluribus Unum*, Latin for "From many, one." Sounds like a noble sentiment, right? ...Describing the unity of our 50 diverse states.

But the truth is our founding forebears plagiarized these inspiring words from the title of a British book, published every year by ~ Gentleman's Magazine. It was an

anthology of articles, and the slogan meant “From many magazines, one book.” J ...’Kind of like finding a new national slogan in the pages of GQ. ☺

So ... what’s in your wallet? What does your money ...say to you?

I fly? Mind your business? E Pluribus Unum?

In God We Trust?

What *that* denarius said to Jesus was: “Give to the emperor....what is the emperor’s, and to God...what is God’s.”

~There’s meaning - - in money.

The Pharisees are trying to catch Jesus in a trap. So they send their scribes to him. But they don't go alone; they also bring along some of King Herod’s followers. (Watch how this works!) The Pharisees followers try to bait the trap, saying, “ Teacher, we know you are sincere! You teach the way of God in accordance with truth. You show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality” (Matthew 22:16). (Can you just feel the smarminess.. in their false flattery?)

But - it doesn’t work.

Jesus is aware of their motives. ...And He’s definitely on guard when they say, “Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?” (v. 17)

The trap has been set. Jesus be nimble; Jesus be quick....beware to not trip this trick. And he is!

“You hypocrites!”, he says. “Why are you even putting me to the test?” (v. 18)

Jesus knows they’re asking about a particular tax, a tax...payable only in Roman coin. The problem is, that denarius contains ..an image and inscription — “Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest”. Get it?! This slogan...*is blasphemous* to Jews. Only God is god. ..So Caesar - cannot be high priest. ..If Jesus says “Yes, it’s lawful to pay,” he alienates the Jewish nation.

◇ On the other hand, if he says “No,” ...he risks arrest by the Romans. ...Who are right there! (Now see how that works?) The tricky Pharisees brought them with... !! This is a lose-lose proposition.

* But Jesus spots.. a way out. He asks the Pharisees followers for the coin.. used for the tax, and they give him one. !!! ...**Notice** ...the Pharisees have in their possession one of the blasphemous coins, not Jesus! He has to ask for it...

“Whose head is this, and whose title?” he asks.

“The emperor’s,” they answer, ~wondering what he’s getting at. And in one quick move, Jesus slips completely out of their trap. “Give therefore to Caesar what is Caesar's, - - and to **God**..what is God’s” (vv. 19-21)

By saying what is Caesar's should be given the Emperor, Jesus *avoids* a direct yes or no response — one that would get him in serious trouble with the Jews on one hand, or the Romans...on the other.

But - - in *answering the way he does*, he gives an indirect yes; he implies paying the tax is not against Jewish law. But he then goes beyond what is asked and says what is **God's...belongs to God!**

Loyalty to God is on a different level, right? We – owe - much - higher fealty to God than to anyone of earthly authority. **Amen?**

What happens next is....almost funny. ...Except ..for how sad it is. The Pharisees followers realize ***(high pitch voice)* Jesus has escaped their cunning trap. And amazed, they kind of.....stumble away (v. 22).

well - There's a lot of meaningfound in money. Heavens: show me how you spend your money and I will show you every idol in your life!

Jesus - knows - - - money ...is a major factor shaping our lives. He focuses on it a great deal in his ministry — **more** than he emphasizes human sexuality. (Want to get in trouble with Jesus? Watch your ps and qs around m, millions, being rich.) In fact, *as a topic*, he focuses on money more than any other topic... except the subject...of Heaven on earth.

For Jesus, money is to be used: to pay taxes, yes. But that's pennies on the dollar.. compared to how we can use it.. to make - God's - world - better!

Money is never an end in itself, a treasure to be socked away... (..For a quarter millennium ~ like a Continental Dollar...until it's multiplied in value 1,500 times.)

What's the point of that? You'd die long before you see the appreciation. And you can't take it with you! “There are no luggage racks on hearses.” ☺

The meaning of money is - it's - an asset, a resource, a **power**.. for us to put to work in the world. If you listen carefully, your money is not saying “I fly”. Or'mind your business.” Instead, it is saying, “Use me!” Put me to work...for you to help God.

This - - is a stewardship sermon. So it needs be said that good stewards.. are those who *use the resources* they have been given. **Spend money** ..to advance their master's interests.

That's precisely what we're supposed to do.. in Christian stewardship. Everything we possess has been given us by our loving Lord.. in a wild gesture of generosity. ☺

We don't really own anything ourselves. Instead - we care for what belongs to God ...as long as we are allowed to walk this earth. That's stewardship.

We relish God's gifts. We delight in them! We manage them ... but then - we let go of them. ~ So why not let go in a way that advances God's will?

It's true... We must give some coins to the emperor; death and taxes are still certain. But beyond this, in our giving, we have great freedom. And it's good for

us ...to be generous with the money we have. Writer Anne Lamott says, “Giving ...is how we feel abundant.” “Giving away... fills *our* spirits up.”

Sam Lloyd, dean of Washington National Cathedral, makes the point that since we live in a consumer culture, we need help... learning how to be generous. In *that way*, he says,...the poor can help us. Generally, they practice greater generosity than the rich. ☺

Lloyd notes ..people give generously ..when they believe there is an important mission at work. ...When they see real opportunities to advance God’s interests in the world. That means being clear about the mission and ministry of the church. Adding concrete details to Jesus' invitation to - give “to God what is God’s”. People give boldly... generously.. when they see mission projects that heal the sick and liberate the oppressed. ..At home and abroad. ..Christian education that shapes the hearts and minds of children and adults ... Worship services that glorify God and uplift the people ... fellowship activities that move people from isolation to community, and from casual acquaintance to deep-spirited friendship. ~These... *are all - opportunities* to bring Heaven to earth. To serve the Lord of love and generosity ...by living lives of love and generosity.

And the Bible can help us... It recommends the tithe — a 10-percent gift as a model for giving.

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Money - is a valuable - part.... of our spiritual life. And we need to learn how to express our beliefs *not only with words, but with our wallets*.

☺ What’s in your wallet, beloved?

What’s your bank account saying to you?

And how are you going to use it?

Look at an American coin, and you won’t see the inscription “Tiberius Caesar, august son of divine Augustus, high priest.”

You will see the words “Liberty”. And... “In God We Trust.”

Hopefully, words that remind us - of Jesus Word: to rely on our good, gracious God. ..To trust..... God will care for us in the future, just as in the past.

And we do have “Liberty”. We - *are ..free* ..to be generous in our giving,as faithful stewards ...of the great abundance God has given us.

We trust in a loving and generous God.

And we live in liberty to support God’s work in the world.

That’s - the meaning of money.

Amen.