

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Proper 24, Year A, October 22, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“What Things Are God’s?”
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:12-22

today is the third of our four Sundays that we will have a Parishioner Testimonial, during announcement time, about why Christ and Grace is important to them; so my sermon today and for one more Sunday will be intentionally brief

in the Gospel reading today, we see Jesus’ opponents try to trap him with a trick question about paying taxes; it puts him in an apparently lose-lose situation; Jesus knows that if he says “yes” to paying taxes, then the people will be upset that he is encouraging them to support the Romans who are occupying Israel; if he says “no” to paying taxes, then the Roman authorities can arrest him for fomenting rebellion; he eludes both dangers by inquiring about the likeness on the coins used to pay taxes; since it is the likeness of the emperor, he says, “give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and give to God the things that are God’s;” so, it is OK to pay taxes, but we must also support God’s work, right?; sounds like Jesus has just voiced the first instance of separation of church and state

but wait just one minute; is there perhaps something deeper in Jesus’ response that neither his original audience nor we have recognized?; remember that the emperor, as every human individual, was created in the likeness and image (remember Genesis ch 1) ... of God; so isn’t the deeper message here really that everything belongs to God?; so all of creation, all created beings, all persons, and all that is produced by the earth, by God’s creatures, and by us rightly belongs to God; and since everything is God’s, we are to give to God any and all of what we have received from God

and what if Jesus were to return to earth today and be asked that same question about paying taxes?; he might not ask whose likeness is on the coin; but he could certainly ask whose name is on every coin and bill we mint: God’s is, because the phrase “In God We Trust” is on every piece of our money

now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't pay our taxes, or live modestly comfortable lives, or support our families, or make provision for the inheritance of our children and grandchildren, and the like; but I am saying that if we follow the mindset that Jesus has taught, then we will look upon everything which flows through our hands, our wallets, our bank accounts, and our investment accounts, and also what flows through our veins and our lungs—our very lives—not as our possessions, but as God's possessions; and we must be mindful and prayerful about any and every use we make of what ultimately does not belong to us

I'm also not saying that every moment of our lives should be engaged in church or overtly religious-related activities; but notice how Paul commends the Thessalonians for imitating Jesus, and for being Christian examples to others; if we are imitating Jesus and living as good Christian examples ourselves, then we are engaged in non-stop church and religious work; it is one of our most important ministries as individual Christians to be witnesses to God in all that we say and all that we do; and that appropriately does recognize that it is God we belong to, and that it is God everything else belongs to also