

October 22, 2023

Hello all,

I trust that you will enjoy this recap of the message on Sunday.

The message itself was pretty simple. What followed were a series of illustrations that I will not repeat here, because it would take far too many words.

The essential message was this: In building any structure that will enable to community to adapt and change, there is an order of importance that Jesus brings us today. And it is this, that it is the *Spirit of the Law that Supersedes the Letter of the Law*. In fact, reversing the order opens the space of the very hypocrisy that Jesus railed against.

The essential lesson was to make the distinction between TALKING AT someone – through TALKING TO someone – to TALKING WITH someone.

TALKING AT SOMEONE – will always close off the conversation because talking at someone shuts the other person down.

TALKING TO SOMEONE – offers the opportunity to make sure that the needs of both parties may be met but doesn't necessarily (I would argue "often") create true community.

TALKING WITH SOMEONE – takes us to a place where regardless of the rules and laws, we find a way to make things work. The rituals, although important, are not the point. The rituals serve the purpose of creating safe space for us to build community.

This is what it means to "Give to God what is due to God" in a world that is only to obsessed with its own material gain.

Here's our biblical interpretation. Enjoy!

Be blessed. Be a blessing. REV ERIC

### **Matthew, Chapter 22, verses 15-22 - PREAMBLE**

In today's passage, Jesus is quoted as offering the teaching of: Give to Ceasar what is due to Ceasar - Give to God what is due to God. What stands out for us today is not so much the teaching itself, but the reason Jesus offers it. And connected to this is the teaching technique categorized in modern terms as a

Socratic Method – using questions and offering statements that are open ended to create understanding that is derived through mutual conversation. Rev Eric will say more about this later. For now, let us hear that in today’s passage, Jesus is building a spiritual structure that will in turn support change in societal and systemic structures.

For the last couple of weeks. We have been looking at the topic of structure; The need for it and how it can support change - Change in spiritual disposition. Change in mindset. Change in rituals. Change in culture. We have been doing this in recognition that things are changing rapidly, and structures need to change to help us adapt. They need to facilitate the capacity to have people, as the prayer of Assisi instructs, seek to understand first before seeking to be understood. How to build such a structure, a structure that permits us to seek to understand before being understood, is what today’s passage will point us to.

Two weeks ago, we made the distinction between different kinds of fences – literal structures. There are fences that are designed to keep people out. There are fences that are designed to keep people in, most often against their will. And then there are fences designed to keep people safe. The same is true for spiritual structures – those of laws and relationship dynamics and societal norms.

Last week, we reminded ourselves that when we are not sure about the nature of the fences that are being erected – namely when we are not sure if the fences are meant to keep people out, keep people or keep people safe - when we are not sure about this, tensions will inevitably rise. People become entrenched. And then our assumptions about the other cause us to stumble. And then our spiritual structures crumble or become counter productive. Either way, healthy change is impeded.

In today’s message, Rev. Eric is going to talk about the first steps in building structure that facilitates change – specifically change that makes room for everyone to participate from the ground up rather than from the top down.

In today's reading. Jesus will be confronted by the religious leaders of the day. As they bring an argument that they believe will entrap him. In other

words, they are trying to fence him in. They do this anticipating that Jesus will lash out, which they would use against Jesus to fence him out.

We will hear Jesus talk about God and Ceasar in the same sentence. Rev Eric's interpretation of this move is to point out that this is not an either-or proposition. Jesus invokes the name of God to place everyone else, from the most powerful to the weakest, on the same level – building a structure that keeps everyone safe.

So, Jesus uses the Socratic method to ask the religious leaders this essential question: What are you doing to build a fence that keeps everyone safe?

Listen, then, to our reading taken from the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 22, verses 15-22:

### **The Question about Paying Taxes**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. 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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this and whose title?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed, and they left him and went away.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**