

**Exploring Scripture for October 22, 2023**  
**Matthew 22:15-22**  
**Rev. Greg Batson**

The scripture for today is one of four questions-and-answer encounters between Jesus and Jewish leaders in Jerusalem as he nears the end of his life. They sit between the parables in the Controversy section (21:23-22:14) and Jesus' denouncement of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:1-36).

The religious leaders in Jerusalem had reached their limit with Jesus. He had openly challenged and shamed them in public, and they now feared that his following would increase to dangerous levels. They came up with an idea to entrap him with a "trick" question. The Jewish people despised the taxes that the Romans imposed upon them, so the Pharisees took the "Herodians" with them to hear Jesus' response. The Herodians were the followers of King Herod who were in power because of Rome and would have supported the payment of taxes. If Jesus agreed with paying the taxes, the people will turn away from following him. If he disagreed, then the government officials would accuse him of treason. "Jesus, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth and show deference to no one. Tell us then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (Matt 22:16-17)

Jesus sees through their plan and turns the tables on them. "Show me the coin used for the tax," he replies. They give him a denarius, a silver coin used throughout the Roman Empire with the emperor's head and likeness engraved upon it. Jesus shows them the coin and now answers their question with a question: "Whose head is this, and whose title?" (The inscription on the coin probably read "Tiberias Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus".) "The emperor's," they reply. "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matt 22:21). And with that Jesus' enemies were foiled in their plot to entrap him and went away.

But that leaves the question he asked open for us as well: what are we required to give to the state, and what are we required to give to God? The part about paying taxes, whether we like it or not, is easier to quantify. We are all required to pay federal, state and local taxes to provide for the numerous services that we share. We may not like all the services or disagree on the amount we should pay, but there are certain amounts required of everyone. But what about the other half of Jesus answer: "and give to God the things that are God's" - what does that mean? That is the question for us to figure out today.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- 1) What do you think God is asking you to "give" in support of his Kingdom?  
Prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness?
- 2) Is it difficult to support both the church and state when their values differ?
- 3) How does your faith inform your giving?