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19th Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Isaiah 45:1-7; Matthew 22:15-22

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Last Wednesday was October 15th, six months after April 15th.
And that means the last day, after extensions, to file your tax return.
If you've not done that yet, look out!
Caesar's gonna come and take what's his!

Whether you like it, or not, you've got to pay taxes.
Every Christian knows this because of today's Gospel reading:
"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." (Mt 22:21a)

You know how the old saying goes: *"Only two things in life are certain: death and taxes."*
So, if you enjoy driving on paved roads,
and a police force to protect your home and neighborhood,
armed forces to defend the country,
and firefighters to jump into a burning house to pull out you (and your cat),
then it's taxes you pay.

The money you earn and the money you spend has the image and inscription of the one who governs this kingdom of roads and armies and taxes.

You're free to complain about how high or how low you think the taxes ought to be.
You're free to petition and to vote and to act as a citizen in this country.
But in the end, if you want to live and enjoy the freedoms and blessings of this country,
you've got to pay your taxes.

This isn't new. And it's not all that exciting or controversial.
St. Paul would say the same thing:
*"Pay to all what is owed to them:
taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed."* (Rom 13:7)

No matter how much you might dislike the President, the Governor, or anyone on Capitol Hill,
every citizen knows what's required—and that's taxes.

But the Gospel reading for today ends,
"When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away." (Mt 22:22)

Why? What's to marvel at?
Pay taxes? We already know that!
Giving to Caesar what's Caesar's isn't worth marveling over in the least.
And so you know that's not the point of today's reading.

What they marveled at was what followed, the second half of Jesus' saying,
"and to God the things that are God's."

Now, there's a bit of irony in the way the Pharisee disciples and the Herodians tried to trap Jesus. However, we miss some of it in translation. The Greek literally reads:

*“Teacher, we know that you are true and that in truth you teach the way of God and it does not matter to you concerning anything;
for you do not look into the face of men.” (22:16)*

(Our English has simply:

“you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.”)

What's ironic is that Jesus' answer shows that He alone *does in fact* look into the face of men. He *is* swayed by appearances—

not in how one dresses
 or the make-up they put on,
 or the pretense they show, or anything like that—
 but He is swayed by their *humanity*.

He looks into the face of men and sees the bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.

He looks into the face of men and sees His bride, the Holy Church.

He sees sheep without a shepherd,
 the lost needing to be found,
 the dead needing to be raised,
 and the children of Adam and Eve needing entrance back into Eden.

In the face of men Jesus sees the image and likeness of God by which He created them. He sees His own, and has come to call His own back to Himself.

But His own would not receive Him.

His own sought to kill Him, because they already had a god—
 and that god bore an image and inscription: it was Caesar and his gold.

Money isn't just the god of the Pharisee disciples and the Herodians.

It's also, all too often, our own god.

How often do we fear that the Church will cease if the money doesn't come in?

How often do we miss this holy gathering because we have to “work”?

How many fights at the death of a parent center on money?

How many divisions in family and church over this god of mammon?

When Jesus says you can give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,

He's calling out your false god, and demanding that you leave him at the door.

And with him, your fear and false confidence,
 your selfishness and your pride.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” (1 Tim 6:10)

Caesar is seen in gold and silver, and in little green pieces of paper and square plastic cards. God, however, is seen in humanity—

and particularly in the humanity of Jesus Christ, the Son!

We distinguish these two in our Catechism, when we confess Christ saying:

*“[He] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person,
purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil;
not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood
and with His innocent suffering and death...”*

It is in this death of Christ that we see the fulfillment of His own words:

“and to God the things that are God’s.”

For in the death of Jesus there is a total giving back to God of humanity.

It’s a total sacrifice, nothing held back, nothing waiting just in case, nothing restricted or left out.

All of humanity and all that separated us from God is now given back to Him.

Christ Jesus is our tribute, He is our tax;

and in Him we are given back to God.

And that humanity of Jesus Christ—the flesh and blood of the eternal Word of God—
has united Himself (body and soul) *to you*.

That’s the Holy Supper.

That’s the gift given and received at this altar.

The image and likeness, the inscription and the Name, the body and the blood *for you*.

Here, what is God’s is rendered to God, including *you*.

You are offered up to God.

You are a living sacrifice, wholly and pleasing to Him.

Here, at this altar you confess the death of Christ for you and for all humanity.

And from this altar you bring this confession and sacrifice to the world.

For you bear the image and likeness, the inscription and Name of God.

“For it is no longer [you] who live, but Christ who lives in [you].” (Gal 2:20)

Caesar requires his image on every coin and currency.

And through taxes, demands the return of his image.

God, however, has chosen to carve His image and likeness in humanity,

and through the redemption of His Son, who bears perfectly His image and likeness,
has called all that is His back to Himself—

and that means every race and tribe and people and language;

and every shape and size and color and weight;

the rich and the poor, the old and the recently conceived;

and even you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit