

The Meaning of Money
Matthew 22:15-22
October 22, 2014

Hand out nickels and markers.

What is the famous line from the movie *Jerry McQuire*? Yes, there are several, one of them being “You complete me,” which makes my eyes role. The other is “Show me the money.” Did you know that phrase did not originate with that movie? It actually originated with Jesus! You can find it in today’s Gospel reading.

Actually, he said, “Show me the coin.” Kind of the same thing. So, let’s talk about coins for a moment.

The first national coin was minted in 1776. This pewter coin was designed by Benjamin Franklin, and it was 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 known how money seems to “fly” away.

According to *mental_floss* magazine (September-October 2007), the coin also bears the odd phrase, “Mind your business.” I have a feeling it doesn’t mean buzz off, but perhaps wise words to the businessperson.

If you look at your nickel (a typical American coin today), you’ll see the words *E Pluribus Unum*, Latin for “From many, one.” Of course, referring to the 50 diverse states into one country.

So, the question for us today is, as the commercial says: what’s in your wallet? We are going to ask the question today “What is the meaning of money?”
What does your money say to you?

I fly? Mind your business? *E Pluribus Unum*?

The coin had meaning for Jesus: “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

The question becomes: what things are Caesar’s and what things are God’s? And what does that have to do with the meaning of money? Or, for that matter, my money?

Let’s back up a moment and take a look at why Jesus said what he did.

Two groups of people, who don't like each other, come together to trap Jesus. You have the Pharisees who are Jewish and hate Rome and don't want to pay taxes to Rome. They feel that Rome has subjected the Israelites; there is no freedom.

To add fuel to their argument, taxes must be paid with a Roman coin which has the image of Caesar on it, and has the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." The coin is considered blasphemous by devout Jews because only God is divine.

Then you have the Herodians, who are Jewish, but are Roman friendly. They supported and endorsed Roman rule over Israel. In many ways, life under Roman rule was safer. Yes, they had lost their independence, but they had roads, peace and security. The Herodians felt it was right to pay for that protection and peace with taxes.

So, these two get together and ask Jesus a yes-or-no question. It is a trap, because either way he answers it, he will make someone mad.

The question is this (verse 17): "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" If Jesus answers yes, he makes devote Jews (his own people) angry. The Pharisees and Rome are hoping people will desert Jesus. If Jesus answers no, he makes Rome angry, and they might do something to stop him. No matter how Jesus answers the question, it will be a wrong answer.

This is sort of like asking the question, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" If you answer yes, you just admitted you beat your wife. If you answer no, you admit you beat your wife. Either way you answer it, it condemns you as a wife beater. Either way Jesus answers this question, it condemns him.

But, Jesus dodges their trap, and gives one of most famous statements of Jesus, although most people only remember the first part: Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's. Let's quote from our text (verse 21): "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.

The verb "give" more literally should be translated "to give back." So Jesus' statement would sound like this: Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and (give back) to God what belongs to God.? What can be wrong with giving back something that belongs to that person in the first place?

Have people answer: what things are Caesar's and what things are God's?

What things are Caesars:

The coin was minted and issued by Caesar. It belongs to him. He can require that it be given back any time he wants, and people are obliged to give it back. It is the same way today. In the United States, we have a structure, as government, to administer and run the laws of the land. Therefore, it is right that we pay for that support and protection by your taxes.

I am reminded of a story about a man named Bob who seeks out the advice of a tax accountant. The tax accountant announces to the man: "I'm going to say to you what I say to every taxpayer who sits in that chair: you should realize that it's a privilege to live in this country and you should pay your taxes with a smile."

"Thank goodness," said a visibly relieved Bob, "I thought you were going to ask me for money."

Give to Caesar what is Caesars. His image is imprinted on the coin, so give it back to him. It's not against the Jewish law to pay taxes.

What things are God's?

When Jesus says, "give to God the things that are God's" the question becomes: what belongs to God? Well, everything because God created the heavens and earth and everything in it, including us. We are different from anything else on earth because we bear the image of God. Just as the coin bore the image of Caesar, thereby belonging to Caesar, we bear the image of God, and therefore we belong to God.

And not only do we belong to God, but everything we possess belongs to God because God made it. **PPT** Everything we have "has been given to us by our loving Lord in a wild gesture of generosity. We don't really own anything ourselves, but instead we care for the things that belong to God...We relish them, 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 interests?" (*Homiletics*, Sept/Oct 2008, p60).

Take look again at your nickel. It does not say, "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." Instead, you'll see the words "Liberty" and "In God We Trust" (find these on your nickel).

The word "liberty" reminds us that we are free to be generous in our giving out of the great abundance God has given us

The phrase “In God We Trust” challenges us to rely on God and to believe that God will care for us in the future, just as God has cared for us in the past.

Take out a credit card. If you don’t have one, take out a dollar bill. If you are willing, take a marker (already on seats) and draw a cross somewhere on the card. Every time you use this card, you will see that cross. It will remind you that the money you are about to spend belongs to God.

That’s the meaning of money.