

Our Divine DNA

[Text - Matthew 22:15-22]

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Imagine how excruciating it would feel to be forced to pay taxes to support a foreign army occupying your own homeland. In Jesus' day, the people of Judea are enduring that very circumstance. That's why tax collectors are so fiercely despised. That's also why the religious authorities think they finally have Jesus trapped, with their question about paying taxes. If he says "yes" to paying taxes to the emperor, the people will resent and reject him; but if he says "No, don't pay the tax," the Roman authorities can take him away as a subversive enemy of the state. Either way, the religious authorities figure that they're about to ruin Jesus' capacity to inspire and lead the people; however, once again, they are wrong.

In spite of their attempt to make him give a direct "yes" or "no" answer, Jesus doesn't play into their hand. He knows that their question is simply a trap, and not a sincere quest for insight or enlightenment. So he's not going to give those sneaky schemers anything to use against him. Nevertheless, even though Jesus side-steps their trap, he still addresses a genuine issue that's been raised - which is the issue of where one's loyalty and commitment ultimately lie. This is a timeless issue, which challenges people of every nation and in every generation - including you and me today.

While Jesus doesn't provide a quick or easy answer to those who struggle to be faithful to God, *and* loyal to their nation, he does however *coin* a phrase [as it were] which provides a guiding principle to apply to this endeavor. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's!" Essentially, Jesus is encouraging people to figure out the

implications of this issue for their own time and situation; yet he still provides some important insight for doing so.

In this morning's Call to Worship, the Psalmist declares, "The earth is the Holy One's, and *all* that is within it; the world, and all that lives therein." Jesus is totally committed to this notion of a Divine "Eminent Domain" over all things, all people, and all of Life. Therefore Jesus doesn't allow the religious or political powers of his day to keep him from fully embracing and enjoying Life, or from enhancing the lives of all those around him. And he certainly doesn't allow narrow-minded social, religious, or political prejudices to keep him from reaching out to all kinds of people, regardless of their past history or current status.

For Jesus, judging people as being either good or bad; or categorizing things as being either sacred or secular - are pointless practices. To him, there is no one or no thing in this entire Creation that doesn't ultimately belong to the Divine Source from whom everything originates. And in Jesus' practical application of that belief, there is no person on earth who cannot receive - or reflect - the gracious love of that Divine Source. In fact, Jesus makes a special effort to evoke that Divine Compassion and Grace in the lives of those people who many see as worthless *sinners and losers*: the poor and downtrodden, prostitutes and lepers, foreigners and other social outcasts. He even recognizes the Divine value in those traitorous *tax-collectors* - inviting one of them, Matthew, to be part of his closest circle of followers and friends.

The Good News that Jesus Christ reveals, is that the Divine Presence is *incarnate*, and *inescapable* - that the Sacred Imprint is everywhere, and Divine DNA is in everything and everyone! This is why Jesus can say that it's appropriate to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Because in the final analysis, *everything* come from

God, belong to God, and return to God! And when you and I remember this and trust it, we will be far more willing to render all that we have and all that we are, toward advancing that which is Godlike - good and loving, positive and Life-affirming. And this will affect every aspect of our lives, including our citizenship. Because when you and I pay our taxes [assuming that we *do*] we then have a vested interest in advocating that the money be used in ways that are in line with a Good and Wholesome purpose.

This is why it's possible and *patriotic* for American citizens to support our military troops, yet strongly protest against the way in which those troops are used. We can respect and honor the men and women who courageously serve in our armed forces, yet still speak-out against governmental policies or practices that we believe to be detrimental to our nation or to our world. We can be proud of the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officials who put their lives on the line to protect our own; yet still stand-up [or take a knee] against systemic police racial profiling or excessive use of force. Personally, I stand with my hand over my heart - in part, because I am truly proud and grateful to live in a nation where everyone is free to peacefully express his or her political opinion.

Regardless of where one's political loyalties lie, one thing you and I must always remember is that our ultimate allegiance belongs to our Compassionate Source of Life - the One who calls us to love and respect one another. The One who entrusts us to take good care of "the world, and all that lives therein!" When we remember this, it gives us the inspiration and the courage to work for a fair and peaceful society; and to treat our precious planet with reverence and respect. It keeps us from the illusion that there is *anything* in our lives, or any part of our lives, which cannot be rendered in service to our Divine Source. And it empowers us to follow the Way of Jesus Christ - the One who gives himself

completely to the Holy One and to others; the One who continues to call you and me to do the same.