

GRASPING FOR MUCH-NEEDED GRACE:
20 Days of Nonpartisan Prayer in a Polarized Political Season
Vermont Conference (UCC) prayer initiative
Fall 2020

“Belonging to God”

Day 19 (November 2, 2020)

by Ed Sunday-Winters

Scripture focus: . . .*Then he said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’* (Matthew 22:21 NRSV)

Reflection: The verse above is the conclusion of Jesus reply to a question about paying taxes. The Pharisees are trying to trap him with a question about paying taxes to the emperor of Rome. Paying taxes to one's own country is more than some people want to do. Paying taxes to a foreign government that has invaded and currently occupies your country is something few, if any, of us would want to do. Yet, this is a situation in which residents of Judea find themselves in the time of Christ. Their country has been conquered by the mighty Roman Empire.

If Jesus gives an affirmative answer to the question about paying taxes to the emperor, the Pharisees will use his answer against him. But if he gives a negative answer he risks being arrested for inciting sedition. Neither of these outcomes is desirable.

When Jesus asked for a coin and inquires about whose image is on it, he moves this politically tense conversation in a more consequential direction. The image on the coin belongs to Caesar. If Caesar's image is on the coin, then give it to him

Jesus does not ask his questioners whose image is on them, but his response cannot help but make them think about it. He says, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

In the climax of the creation story found in Genesis chapter 1 that would have been familiar to Jesus questioners, verse 27 reads,

“So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”

Those questioning Jesus and all the rest of us human beings are stamped with God’s image. God has made us God’s own. Following the intent of Jesus’ reply, we should not give to anyone that which belongs to God. Our civic duty compels us to vote for one candidate or another. Hopefully, we do that after a careful and thoughtful decision-making process. Jesus reply reminds us that God alone is worthy of the heart of us, the soul of us. There is no political party, candidate or country worthy of the worship and devotion that is due only to God.

In this election, devout people of all faiths and people who adhere to no religion will cast their ballots for Democrats, Republicans, independents and for third-party candidates. They will represent a broad diversity of thought, opinion, and outlook, but they will all have one thing in common. They will all be human beings created in the image of God. Everyone of them will be God’s beloved.

Regardless of the outcome of this election, that is an important truth for those of who seek to follow the one who calls us to meet our neighbors and our enemies with love.

Prayer: Holy God, give us love for our neighbors and our enemies. Open our eyes so we can see your image in all who come our way so that understanding and compassion may be the fruit of your love for us. Amen.

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