

**Lectionary 29 Year A 2020**  
**October 18, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our gospel story this morning Jesus again has a showdown with the Pharisees. This time, the question is about paying taxes. This might seem like simply a reality of our world, but in the time and place of Jesus, the Ancient Near East was a conquered territory of Rome. Some people in the Ancient Near East saw paying taxes as supporting a tyrannical government. And to be fair, some people today would say the same thing. But in our gospel reading, the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus by making him commit to either supporting the tyranny of Rome (by saying taxes should be paid) and discrediting his own authority, or supporting his country and committing treason against the emperor (by saying they should not be paid), which was a crime punishable by death. Jesus' answer manages to sidestep the trap that has been laid, shifting the question from legal obligation, to a question of ownership.

"Whose face is on the money?" Jesus asks. After hearing the Pharisees' response, Jesus suggests that's the person who must own the coins, and if Caesar wants them badly enough to put his face on them, you might as well give them to him. But Jesus continues, and suggests that we also must give to God what is God's. But then, we must ask, "What belongs to God?" Of course, in this stewardship month we are reminded that *everything* belongs to God. God created the earth, the cosmos, and everything within it. So that means that we don't own anything, but we are instead simply stewards of God's creation. But if we follow Jesus' logic, it seems that we are meant to give everything back to God—because God, ultimately, is the owner. Of course, this doesn't sit too well with us, having to give all of our money and all our possessions to God. We can talk about donating our time talents and treasures to the church as a way to give back to God what is God's, but even the church doesn't demand that we give everything.

So, maybe we should try to answer the question, "What belongs to God?" by asking "Where do we see God's face?" or "On what is God's face printed?" The Bible, of course, has an answer to this question. In Genesis 1, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image." Humanity is made in the image of God. But what does this mean? To put it simply, it means that all of us, all of humankind—we have a family resemblance. We all have a family resemblance. And yet, painfully, this family resemblance can be hard to see.

During the summer a few years ago, while our family was grocery shopping, Mason had gone back to grab something from one of the aisles, and so Ella and I began checking out. Of course, this was later in the summer, and Ella, having skin like her father, had gotten wonderfully tan. I on the other hand, am unable to tan, and was my normal pale self. As we walked past one of the checkout lanes, a cashier noticed Ella and I walking together, and exclaimed, "Are you the woman who adopted that girl from Mexico?" Thankfully, I could simply pretend I hadn't heard the woman, and I continued on to another checkout lane. But apparently, the family resemblance was hard to see.

This is the world that we live in! It is a world that would tell us that if we look different enough we could not *possibly* be family. Often, this world says that the image of God is reserved for only one kind of person. This happens even in our own nation, for all of its dreams and aspirations. Our nation was built on the idea that our black and brown brothers and sisters aren't our brothers and sisters. They had less worth, and were less human. The founding fathers believed that the family resemblance wasn't there, and only the wealthy, white, land owning, tax paying people, had the image of God. At the birth of our nation it was only these people who

could vote, hold office, or otherwise wield power or make decisions. And unfortunately, this idea is not simply part of our history, but it is alive and well today. It influences the systems that shape our lives. Systems that determine where we live, and where we work, and who our children go to school with. Systems that determine who ends up on the news and how they are portrayed, who goes to jail and for how long. Who can open a business and who gets hired. Who gets shot by police, and who gets to walk away with a warning.

All this, all this pain and suffering, comes from our refusal to see the image of God, the face of God imprinted on our neighbor if that person looks too different from us. There is another story; A Muslim Imam is instructing his students concerning Ramadan, and his students bring to him an argument they are having. They are arguing about when they know that dawn has come. The first student says that you know the dawn has come when you can look at the woods and recognize a deer. The second student says the dawn has come when you can look at the sky and recognize a bird. And the third says that the dawn has come when you can look at a stream and recognize a fish. Their teacher considers all this for a moment and replies, "You will know that the dawn has come when you can look at your neighbor and recognize your brother."

I love that story because it gets at the fundamental truth that, all of us, every person from every nation—all people—are made in the image of God. The dawn of justice truly comes when we are willing to recognize this truth: that we are all brothers and sisters, no matter how much our world or society might try to wish or will that family resemblance away. God has imprinted God's own image onto all of us.

So how do we render unto God what is God's own? We are called to care for our creation, not as an inheritance from our ancestors but as a trust for our children. We are called to seek justice for our brothers and sisters who are oppressed, feed the hungry, and visit the sick and imprisoned. We are called to be a reflection of the image of God for our world and for our communities.

And it all starts at the baptismal font. At this font, where each of us was baptized. It was at the font that we were made into children of God and our family resemblance that we all share was affirmed. In these waters of grace and mercy God saves us. But God does it not because we have already recognized all peoples as our brothers and sisters, not because we have already striven for justice. Many of us were baptized when we were still babies, and we had accomplished none of this. Yet these saving waters are for each of us; for you and for me, no matter where we are in our lives, and no matter what we have achieved or accomplished. Because this font is the beginning of our lives within the family of God. It is the starting point where salvation is promised and where that promise starts to be fulfilled. This is where our Heavenly Father calls us and names us. This is where we begin to recognize our family resemblance. This is where we are received by our God and imprinted, like a coin, with God's own image. Thanks be to God. Amen.