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Giving to God, what is God's.

There are some questions that are just dangerous to answer. They are the kind of questions that are designed to get you in trouble no matter how you respond.

Like when you've done something wrong and your mom asks you "what were you thinking?" That one is dangerous to answer.

Or if your dad asks you "what do you think I am, stupid?" Definitely don't answer that.

Or maybe you sit down amidst a bunch of Eagles fans and you're wearing a Cowboys Jersey, and someone says "Are you rooting for the Cowboys?" Don't answer that one either. Just run.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked a trick question by his religious leaders. They want to get him in trouble. They ask him whether God wants people to pay taxes to the emperor Caesar, who wanted the people to worship him like he was a god. Those leaders think they have Jesus in a corner. If he says "it's fine to pay taxes to Caesar," he gets in trouble with people who don't like to pay taxes or who don't like Caesar – like everyone Jesus knew. Or if he says "No, paying taxes is a sin" he gets in trouble with the emperor. That never ends well.

But Jesus wiggles out of it. He says, "show me the coin you are talking about."

The coin has Caesar's face on it.

And Jesus says, give to the emperor the things that belong to the emperor. His face, his coin. But give to God the things that belong to God.

Those leaders had nothing to say after that.

But that last sentence is still ringing in my ears. Because that statement wasn't just meant for the local leaders. It's meant for us as well.

Give to God, what belongs to God.

What does belong to God exactly?

I would say pretty much everything, wouldn't you? I mean God made it all, God is master of all. Jesus would agree – and he was probably telling his leaders that since everything belongs to God, you better be careful how you treat it.

What if God wanted everything back better than it was originally? That might be tricky, given that we've made sort of a mess of things like the environment and peace and things like that.

Jesus actually trapped his challengers when he asked them to show him that coin. What were they doing with images of Ceasar in their pockets if they were so concerned about it in the first place?

If Ceasar's face was on their coins, what was God's face on?

Well one place that you'll find God's face is on people¹ – because we say that people are made in God's image and likeness. Even though we all look pretty different from one another, there is still something about us that resembles God – no matter what gender or sexual orientation you identify with, or what color your skin is, or whether you body works as well as the next person's.

The thing that makes us resemble God is our ability to love and receive love. If you've ever seen someone with a face full of love, you know what I mean. It's beautiful.

So it seems to me that if we all belong to God, then that means God has placed us in one another's hands for safe keeping, until God asks for us back. The best way to take care of people is to love them, the way God loves them. All of them. Even if they show up in a Cowboy's jersey. Or say the wrong thing, or make us angry or disappointed or sad.

That doesn't mean we have to like everything that people do – whether they are kids or grownups. We still get to say no when we mean no, and "that's wrong" when things are wrong, and ouch when people hurt us, and stop when the way that people are treating us or others must be stopped.

Jesus did all of these things. And sometimes he got in trouble for them. He said no when people tried to make him a king. He said "that's wrong" when the leaders weren't serving people the way they should. And he said "stop" when his own followers got all judgy and blamey of other people.

That's one of the ways that Jesus loved the people that were made in God's image. He loved them with the truth about themselves. And with forgiveness when they

¹ (Beginning with Tertullian, many have identified 'the things that are God's' with human beings. If coins with Caesar's image and inscription belong to Caesar, then human beings created in God's image (Gen 1:26) belong to God.) Muddiman, John; Barton, John. *The Gospels* (Oxford Bible Commentary) (p. 67). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

messed up. And with healing when they were broken or suffering. With friendship when they were rejected.

Maybe Jesus came here among us to show us how to take care of everything that belonged to God. Maybe even give it back to God better than we found it.

So here's some questions to ask ourselves today.

What or who has God given you to take care of?

Who have we at St Peter's been given to love, as God loves?

What or who might we give back to God in even better shape than we found them?

That's the real question here. It's not a trick question. It's the kind that we answer by doing. Because the love that God gives us, is something that we are meant to give back to God, and still have plenty left.

Amen.