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 Proper 24A: Matthew 22:15-22
 18 October 2026

At first glance, the conclusion of today's Gospel seems to be
 an advertisement for the Container Store
 "a place for everything, and everything in its place"
 "Give therefore to the emperor the things
 that are the emperor's,
 & to God the things that are God's."

This verse is also often remembered in the King James translation:

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's;
 and to God the things that are God's."
 Seems easy enough, right?
 Pay your taxes &
 remember that people of the book are also
 beholden to the divine
 A place for everything
 Everything in its place.
 Many might also hear
 the 1st amendment here—
 separation of church
 & state

But this is not the United States.

We are in Jerusalem approximately two thousand years ago.
 There are Pharisees and Herodians and denarii mucking about.
 We are in the last week of Jesus' life.
 And he is being troublesome.

Not let's kill the man troublesome,
 but troublesome nonetheless.
 He's overturning tables in the temple.
 He answers questions
 in ways that agitate
 The ppl around him.

Today, it's the Pharisees and the Herodians approaching Jesus
 to try and entrap him, as the text says. First they try to butter Jesus up
 Then they ask: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

Now the Pharisees are extremely devout, faithful men.
 The Pharisees hate Roman rule as Roman rule often interfered
 w/ their ability to follow the divine in the way they would like,
 the way they believe YHWH wants to be followed.

We don't know much about the Herodians.
 We **do** know the Herodians are somehow aligned with,
 supportive of King Herod Antipas, the Roman appointed ruler
 of this area during most of Jesus' lifetime.
 So Herodians **support** Roman rule,
 The same Roman rules Pharisees
 Hate with an undying passion.

That the Herodians and Pharisees are working together is bonkers.
 Their collaboration signals how much trouble Jesus is causing.
 It's almost like the Yankees and Red Sox joining hands
 and singing We are the World.

Secondly, the denarius– the denarius has come up a lot lately in Matthew.

A denarius is a day laborer's wage.

What we have not discussed yet about the denarius is this–

Roman coins, including the denarius,

had a picture of the Roman emperor on it,

probably the emperor Tiberius.

The Roman emperor is considered a god

both during his reign and after he dies.

& Roman coins depict the emperor as divine.

The coin is physical manifestation of how Roman rule

runs counter to the first commandment.

You shall have no other gods before me.

Not only are ppl paying inane high taxes,

What ppl have to pay **with** proclaims there **is** another God

besides God– the Roman emperor. Insult to injury

In New Revised Standard Version, which we generally hear read aloud,

And which I generally prefer,

Jesus responds to is it lawful to pay taxes

w/ a question, "Whose head is this & whose title?"

As Bishop Logue, the diocesan bishop of Georgia, argues,

this translation obscures Jesus' meaning.

The word translated as "head" is "icon,"

a Greek word better translated as "image."

The word "title" is also better

translated as "likeness."

“In whose image and in whose likeness?”

NOT “Whose head is this and whose title?”

“In whose image and in whose likeness?”

Now the original folks hearing **that** phrasing
 would have likely found themselves transported back,
 back to the language at the very beginning of the Torah,
 back to the first creation story in what we call Genesis 1
 back to when God creates humankind
 in the divine image:

“And God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our **image**,
 according to our **likeness**,’
 and goes on to state “God created humankind in his image,
 in the image of God he created them.”

So in whose image and in whose likeness?

This question may well have erased some people’s ability to hear the
 Pharisees’ and Herodians’ answer—

like when someone says “this is how we do it,”
 You’re going to lose me for a few of minutes
 To a one hit wonder from 1995
 Playing in my head largely against my will

In spite of this major slight of hand, the group still answers, “The emperor”
 So when Jesus responds, “Give therefore to the emperor the things
 that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s”
 It is within the context of him reminding us just before
 That God is creator of all.
 Jesus has hinted that EVERYTHING

Even ourselves, our souls and bodies,
As Rite I says, are gifts,
gifts God gives us
That we give back to God.

Now this is normally the part in the sermon
where the preacher encourages people to give
and give generously for the annual pledge campaign.
As in yes be a good citizen and yes please give to the church
And I get that. This text mentions literal money
and giving to God what is God's.
It's tempting.

But I truly feel that translation is only surface level.
The money here is really a bit of a bystander.
It's much more about relationship— more specifically,
God's all encompassing relationship with humanity,
with us, with you, with me,
with ppl beyond these walls.

When we work,
when we parent,
when we read,
when we drive,
when we walk,
When we sit,
when we are alone,
when we're with others,
when we shop,
when we rest,

when we hear the news,
 when our hearts are full,
 when our hearts are broken.
 When we are on the internet,
 When we are at our best,
 at our worst,
 at our most mediocre
 at our most painfully boring.

When we made mistakes,
 When we've gotten it right,
 When we agree,
 When we can't agree.
 We are in the image of God.
 We are in the likeness of God.
 We are God's.

And you know what?
 God being closer to me than I am to myself feels hard for me.
 It means I'm not my own person, which is actually true.
 It means my life is not my own, which it never was—
 & that is acknowledged in baptism, not ordination.

God is not just one more thing to check off on a to do list,
 and as uncomfortable & weird as that may be,
 that approach also far more interesting & compelling

b/c as **this** passage reminds us that the divine is the very foundation
 of all of our lives, whether we acknowledge it or not.
 And beloveds, **THAT** is why, even if we're not totally aware of it,

That's why we are all here this morning.

A place for everything , & everything in its place.

You are God's We are God's

1st verses of 665 close as prayer

All my hope on God is founded;

he doth still my trust renew,

me through change and chance he guideth,

only good and only true.

God unknown, he alone

calls my heart to be his own.

Amen.