

Isaiah 45:1-7; Psalm 96:1-13; 1 Thess 1:1-10; Matt 22:15-22 The Rev. Linda Spiers  
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – Oct 22, 2017 Trinity Episcopal Church

The Pharisees and the Herodians plotted against Jesus and tried to trick him with a question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” (Matt 22:17). After looking at a denarius coin, Jesus said, “Whose head is this, and whose title? . . . Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard this, there were amazed; and they left him and went away. (Matt 22:20-22). Yesterday I did the *Mass on the Grass* service in New Britain, and we wondered together about what the Pharisees and Herodians were thinking as they left Jesus. Jesus had thrown a boomerang thought back to them. “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

If we look at our coins today, we see different images and we see important words for us as a nation: “In God we trust” and “Liberty” and “E Pluribus Unum” (Out of many, one). We have a theological statement on our own money. I wonder what a coin tells us about who we are today. What does it say to us about stewardship when we use coins with those words every time we go to pay for something? The coins themselves give us a powerful symbol and call us to think about Jesus’ question: Give to God the things that are God’s.

On this day we celebrate two of Trinity’s young people with the Rite-13 liturgy. We rejoice with them as they move from the world of childhood into the

world of teenager, i.e. adulthood. The words used in this liturgy are powerful, and I commend them to each of you with clear eyesight and good ears. As a congregation we promise to be continued support for Emma and Jonathan as they are on their journey of faith.

The denarius coin that Jesus looked at and said, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” was stamped with the emperor’s image. Emma and Jonathan and you and I are made in the image and love of God. In a sense we’re stamped with the image of God at our baptism and marked as God’s own for ever. Words said as a priest anoints with the oil of chrism are, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever.”

I believe that means we are each called at our baptism to be the best we can be as God’s children—to be all that God intends us to be.

Last week I had the opportunity to attend a class in West Hartford along with about 40 clergy folks and about 10 lay people—an interfaith group. The class was on undoing racism and was taught by the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond out of New Orleans. The People’s Institute helps individuals, communities, organizations and institutions move beyond addressing the symptoms of racism to undoing the causes of racism so as to create a more just and equitable society. It was formed by two long-time community organizers Ronald

Chisom of New Orleans, and Dr. Jim Dunn of Yellow Springs, Ohio. We had two black women and one white man, Joe Barndt, facilitate our class, and they were awesome. Joe was well into his 70s and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was filled with stories of oppression, having lived through those experiences. One of the women, Thea, facilitated parts of the class while the other was an artist who drew some of our charts as well as captured them with words. All three have passion in their bones for undoing racism and for community organizing. They crack open eyes and hearts to be better. They are clearly called to do the work they do all around the country. They are marked as God's children and are making a difference in the lives of many, planting seeds of knowledge and story and history and practical ways for us to be what God intends us to be.

That class was but one example in my week that showed how God works in and through people—people who have been made in the image and love of God, people who are called to be all that God intends them to be.

This story of Jesus reminds us who we are and whose we are by his profound answer, “Give to God the things that are God’s.” We’re called to do that everyday—to give to God ourselves, because we are all God’s children. Emma and Jonathan powerfully remind us of that today also, as they stand before us and continue giving themselves to God. We’re grateful for them and for the ongoing challenge of the Gospel, “Give to God the things that are God’s.” May it be so for each of us!