

Proper 24a: 10/22/17  
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd  
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT

*"Give to emperor the things that are the emperor's,  
and to God the things that are God's."*

My son Cory is home from college this weekend  
for his mid-semester break,  
which means we'll be dropping him off this afternoon  
just like a lot of other parents with kids.  
I can almost predict that someone there  
who's never met me before will identify me as his mother.

Usually it's the mop of hair.  
But one way or another my imprint is all over the poor kid.

In today's gospel from St. Matthew,  
Jesus challenges us to recognize ourselves  
for *who* and *whose* we are.  
To see clearly whose imprint is upon us.

The Pharisees (representing the religious status quo)  
team up with the Herodians (representing the political status quo),  
to ask Jesus a gotcha question:  
"Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

Jesus' answer? Show me the money.

Look at the coin and see the emperor's likeness, says Jesus.  
See the absurdity of the wording which claims that  
the emperor is divine.  
For heaven's sake, know that it takes more than a few words  
stamped on a piece of metal to make that so.

Sure, go ahead, do your civic duty, take it seriously,  
but don't let it define you.  
Realize you are much, much bigger than that.  
Instead, let who you really are guide your civic life,  
and every other aspect  
of this wild and precious life God has given you.

It's not about whose image is on the money,  
but whose image is on YOU.  
*To whom – and what – do you belong?*

With so much strife and chaos in our politics these days,  
 it might sometimes feel like we belong to the emperor.  
 Or maybe we belong to our possessions. You know the saying,  
 "Do we own our stuff or does our stuff own us?"  
 Maybe our jobs "own" us to an unhealthy degree.  
 Or even our families.  
 Anything that keeps us from fully claiming  
 the only identity that matters:  
 Child of God, Beloved, created in God's own image.

That's who we are and, ultimately, it's *all* we are:  
 Child of God, Beloved, created in God' own image.

Jesus shows us what this looks like.  
 Jesus shows us how to live with the divine imprint upon us.  
 Not just on part of our lives. Not just on Sundays.  
 But on everything all the time.

How we spend our time. How we treat others.  
 How we deal with "the emperor" –  
 choosing our civic leaders and holding them accountable.  
 How we earn and spend and give money.

This being the time of our annual stewardship drive,  
 you might be expecting a pitch about the advantages of  
 making a monetary pledge to the parish.

I'm happy to oblige.  
 I'm happy to share how much my family enjoys  
 giving to God's work here in this parish and through other charities.  
 How we are among those in this parish for whom  
 the Biblical concept of tithing –  
 giving ten percent of our household income -- brings us joy.  
 Trusting that no matter what's happening in the world  
 or my husband's business,  
 we by the grace of God can at least afford that.

Sure, like a lot of people, we feel we work hard –  
 but it's God's grace that's given us the will, ability and  
 circumstance to do so.  
 Giving away at least ten percent of what we have  
 helps remind us of this.

We started doing this in earnest back when I was working part-time

(on a clergy salary), pregnant with Cory,  
and my husband lost his job.  
Honestly, I think we just got sick of worrying about money  
until we realized that it's all God's anyway.  
Over time we've found that  
*we need to give* more than we think we can afford  
because it helps us feel better, secure in God's abundance.

I guess you could say that we receive more than we give.  
That in giving we do receive.

That's why Jesus, whose imprint is upon us all, says:  
Show me the money.  
Because just like everything else for those who bear  
God's imprint,  
the money isn't ours, but God's.  
And money – what we do with it and what we don't –  
paints a vivid picture of who we think we are.

Like it or not, my son has inherited something of me.  
I noticed he came home this time having cut  
that infamous hair shorter than I've seen before.  
No matter, I know it's still there and that he's still mine,  
and you know that as a parent I will always claim and love him  
no matter what.  
You know that most parents don't require any physical likeness  
or any biological connection,  
to feel this way.  
We just want our children to find the fullness of the potential  
we see in them.

God has generously placed the divine imprint upon us,  
and sent Jesus to show it to the world in all its fullness.  
Now Jesus invites us to claim this identity  
and offer our lives – our selves, our souls and bodies --  
and, yes, our money as an indication thereof.

Give to God the things -- *all* the things – that are God's.

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