Matthew 22: 15-22 + 1 Thess 1:1-10 - Whose are you?

Whose are you?

This is the question I think Jesus asks *us* in response to the Pharisees' question to him in the temple.

I wonder how you would answer that question? maybe…

- ➔ Your **spouse**? The wedding vows do include 'all that I am I give to you'...
- ➔ Maybe your **parents?** The bible does encourage us to honour them, or maybe it's more negative and you feel bound to them in some other way.
- ➔ Maybe your **children** - maybe in practical terms you feel they own you?
- ➔ Maybe your **friends** - they are your crew, your crowd, they define your identity..
- ➔ Or maybe you feel you belong to the **organisation** you work for.. That this is where your identity is forged, where you give the best of yourself, where you are owned….

In the passage we heard from Paul's letter to the **Thessalonians**, likely his earliest letter, he **gives thanks** for the Christians there, for their coming to faith and their living out of that faith. This is an **encouragemen**t to them but also to those who heard to **do likewise**, to *be* likewise.

The message of the gospel came to them, he says *'not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*.'

And he tells us some of the **key features** of that:

- **Sharing their faith** 'the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you… in every place your faith in God has become known.'
- Offering warm **welcome.**
- **Waiting** for Jesus to return

In v 9 he cites a key bedrock of this, the choice to **'*turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God*'**.

It's *this* choice that I think offers a useful way into one of the challenges to us today from our Gospel passage.

The **money** which the Pharisees produce when Jesus asks them to is an idol.

Let's get some context on that moment:

The **Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus.** They are in league with the **Herodians** (those loyal to the dynasty of Herod = a political faction) - an odd power combo - united in dislike of Jesus. He posed a threat to each group.

He is in the temple, surrounded by people who were hoping that he was the **Messiah**. Most Jews at that time **expected** that a key role of the Messiah would be to overthrow the Romans - the oppressive occupying force they lived under. One of the expressions of that oppression, one of the ways they felt in most, was the **taxes** they had to pay to Rome. These were much **resented**. Seen in the hatred of tax collectors that we read about in the New Testament.

So asking the one that people are saying is the Messiah if Jews should pay these taxes seems an **ideal trick question.**

- If he says yes - he is undermining the idea that he will stand up to Rome, he will be seen as supporting the oppressors.
- If he says no - it's treason - he is putting himself at great risk of causing insurrection .

Let's be clear - **Jesus is not afraid** of either of these outcomes. He is shortly going to be executed as a criminal. The ideas the Jews have of who the Messiah will be will be overturned.

But now is not the time, and he wants to **illuminate the bigger picture of the hearts** of those who ask.

So, as he often does, instead of answering, he asks something in return, often a question, here, he **asks for a coin** - the kind of coin that was used to pay these taxes - a Roman coin. **Roman coins** had two things on them that made them **idolatrous** for Jews: an **image** - a picture of the emperor, and an **inscription** that in this case would almost certainly have declared

the emperor to be the son of God - a form of God. A **blasphemous claim.** A **blasphemous image.**

And yet **the Pharisees have one**, and produce one, in the **temple** - the house of God where no idols, **no images of God, or any other God** or those claiming to be gods were allowed. This already puts them in a bad light - it's a bit **shocking.** These coins were **hated objects.**

So when Jesus says to ***give to Caesar what is Casers*** re the coin - you can imagine him almost tossing away this hated object - recognising its *proper place* and in the larger picture its worthlessness.

This passage has been interpreted as a **directive about obeying** civil authority. I don't think that's the context here - Jesus does not bring up this subject in order to teach on it. He is not giving a directive, he is **responding t**o a politically loaded trick question. This occurs in the **context of his challenge** to the Pharisees and to us which has been running through the **previous chapters -** g*iving God his due.*

What he *does* bring up, *his* emphasis is the next bit:

give to God the things that are Gods.

What is God's? - <u>everything -</u> what should we give him? **Everything**. All that we are.

On the coin is the image of Caesar ;

written on us, the bible tells us, is the **image of God.**

<u>We are made in the image of God - we are his. **That is whose we are.**</u>

Give to God what is Gods: as the beautiful carol in the bleak midwinter says '*all I have I give you, give my heart*'

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Diff emphases of diff theologians all have their place in part I think:

- ***Functional*** - we carry out God's work in the world - stewarding it, being the hands and feet of Jesus
- ***Substantial*** - something about us that is like God - bearer of his Spirit, his character.

- ***Relational*** - uniquely able to relate to God as his children, carrying his essence - his ‘dna.’ but also relating to others in his family as family.

Whose are you?

That is what Jesus asks here - that's the question behind the question. **Will you give all that you are to God?** Will you give him his due.

Will you **turn from idols,** including the idol of money - putting that in its proper place- which does not mean avoiding paying what's necessary but does involve **not finding our identity** or worth on it, or indeed anything else: our job, our family, our status, our peer group.

But solely the fact that **we are God's beloved, filled with his Spirit, bearers of His Word,** or his essence, to others. Giving ourselves to Him fully.

- What does that look like for you?

- What gets in the way?

The Thessalonians are described as **imitators** of God, living as **examples.**. **Bearers** of God. We see here in the earliest NT writing the **living out** of what Jesus is talking about - **by the power of the spirit this is possible,** Paul tells us.

So let's take a moment now to **open ourselves afresh to that spirit,** to **receive that power** so we can live out the image we bear, turn from idols and **know whose we are.**