

## GIVE TO...

This is one of those encounters in scripture that we are familiar with because of the last Verses of the reading – that is Verse 21 -“then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s”. Like a number of the parables we have heard in recent weeks there is more to this story and an application we can use in our daily walk with God. When God inspired men by the Holy Spirit to write, it was so we could so many years later learn of God’s truth, love and grace just as when Jesus walked this earth.

In today’s reading we become a witness of and listen to a conversation where Jesus was confronted by the first of three groups. Each of these groups was trying to “trip up” or entangles Jesus in his own words for their own benefit.

The Herodian group asked a political question because for them it was peace at any price and getting along with Rome. The Sadducees ask a doctrinal question. Because if we use modern terms. They were the “one per centers” of the day only believing in the law and gave the Pharisees a hard time. If the Bible was not logical then the Sadducees resorted to logic. Today we could also label them as scientists and mathematicians. Mind you though not like all scientists or mathematicians!!!

The last group was the Pharisees with an ethical question. The Pharisees believed of the 613 commandments found in the Old Testament, a commandment was heavy or light. It was a matter of keeping a list of rules for them; anything spiritual was out of the question. Religion worked from the outside in and we all know Jesus upset that apple cart when he spoke of the things that come from the heart, not what went in.

You know today there are a larger number of Pharisees walking around and in churches today than we care to admit. People who reduce religion to a list of rules and to break some are not as big a deal as others! “Pastor, you surely can’t compare my little white lie to killing someone?” I would ask you to look through the Bible and I do not see when the word spells out a sin there is a rating attached to it, a ranking! **Sin is sin.** It is man that has given sin “degrees” not unlike the Pharisees, who divided them into heavy and light.

We can draw a modern day comparison to the first question. The answer of “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...” Do we “render” to Caesar what is Caesar’s? It seems for many it is okay, even smart, to cheat or shall we say stretch the tax laws! I would remind us of the Verse in Luke 16 “whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much”. Not my words, in fact these words were spoken by Jesus himself!

Do people in our time come up with questions, maybe even trying to “trap” us in our beliefs? How do we answer them? Do we answer and as the last Verse in today’s reading “and hearing this, they marveled...”?

All three groups misused scripture for their own ends. Do we misuse, misquote, or take a Verse out of context for some personal end? We certainly don’t have all the answers. We may have to seek out someone who has an answer and get back to that person who asked the question.

One way scripture can be misused is to use it to win an argument. It can be a demonstration of biblical knowledge as people want it viewed. This is exactly what the Pharisees and Herodians were up to after previous theological defeats, they were joining together to put Jesus in a no-win situation.

If someone comes to you genuinely desire to learn and has questions take this as an opportunity to share your story. By that I mean what God has done for you. The person is not interested in how much you know, they can read a book to find out religion. You are the best story Jesus Christ has, don’t be fearful to share it!!! I know some Verses and remember those particular ones, why? Because they mean something personally to me! That is what sharing your story is about. Be real; share your story and yourself!!!!!!! That goes farther than any number of quotes from the Bible performed to boost personal ego.

Another method of misusing the Bible or theology is to use an argument that can’t be proven wrong. In a later confrontation with the Pharisees, non-believers of the resurrection, the Pharisees went on about a hypothetical situation of marrying and dying and marrying again, asking what is the situation in heaven. There is no debate or exchange of ideas, the argument had already been won and any debate would just lead to chaos. Jesus refutes their argument with Old Testament scripture and people are astonished at Jesus’ teaching. We too have the truth and people are continuously looking for it.

The Pharisees not ones easily to give up produce a lawyer from their midst and have him ask Jesus an ethical question concerning the great commandment of the law. Jesus uses the scripture from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19.

Now the Pharisees open themselves up to a question by Jesus concerning David and the Messiah or Christ. The Pharisees claim to be people of the word yet they are silent when Jesus uses the word and asks for an explanation but is greeted with silence. In fact Verse 46 tells us no one dared from that day on to ask him another question! Wow!!! We as modern day disciples tend to avoid or skip over the parts of the Bible we can’t explain or do not fall in line with our pre-existing beliefs just as the Pharisees did. Just as I have said before, we enjoy hearing about the love of God, but the accountability and what can come with it, not so much!

We can learn from these encounters Jesus had with these different groups. When they confronted Jesus their thought was one right was right, the other wrong, and he would have to acknowledge that. As it worked out truth proved them both wrong in different ways. Isn't that the exact thing we do between denominations? The truth is none of them have it all right, possibly not even close! How does that look to outsiders, non-christians? One very good example is worship - traditional hymns or praise songs? If Jesus were here right now and we learn anything from today's reading, His answer would probably go something like this – *"it is never about the type of music, it is about giving me your heart completely as you sing"*

I have talked before about the audience, actors and prompter in worship. It is not really about whether you liked the service or the songs or the prayers. Worship is about giving praise and thanks back to God for who he is and what he has done for us!!!!!! I am reminded of the Verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 **"in everything give thanks"** now the Verse doesn't say **for everything**, but **in everything**. No matter what comes along we are to be thankful **in** the situation!

The Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the lawyer all had things to give but Jesus by their questions had an opportunity to give them what was holding them back. Truth, knowledge, justice are all important as reflected in their questions, however God desires us to focus on love.

Jesus said so much when he gave the two Commandments of love God and love your neighbor. We can see from these groups and their questions what too can happen to us when our focus is on other things. We can become angry, quick to argue, little time for people or time to spend with God. When we love God and love our neighbor other things come into perspective and we lead a more balanced life.

We are at that time of the year when stewardship comes front and center. Today's reading really does point to what stewardship is all about. *Render...to God the things that are God's...* by definition to render is the action of giving, yielding, or surrendering something. God's desire is for us to give him our self. This is something the groups that asked Jesus questions did not fully understand and even though they marveled, were astonished or even silent they would still not give them self to God. Let's not make the same mistake they did. Love God and love your neighbor. That is being the best steward of that which God has first given us – his son Jesus Christ.

John Wesley on his spiritual journey admired and learned from the Moravians. Here is their view on stewardship and rendering to God....

"We deem it a sacred responsibility and genuine opportunity to be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us: our time, our talents, and our financial resources. We view all of life as a sacred trust to be used wisely."

Amen and amen.