

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

October 18, 2026

Text: Matthew 22:15-22

“Whose Image?”

What were they thinking, those Pharisees who sent a team of their disciples with some Herodians to try to catch Jesus in His words? That it would be easy? That He would be fooled by their flattery? *“Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.”*

Did they hope that He would step into the trap that they laid for Him?

These were the days that led up to the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples had come up there for the festival, but He also knew that He would die there before its end. Over the three years of His ministry, as Jesus taught the way of God’s reign, He also corrected the false beliefs and practices of the religious leaders. He knew that they hated Him and wanted to destroy Him, and though He knew that they would get their wish soon, He still wanted them to repent and believe the good news of God’s kingdom.

This posse, sent by the Pharisees, posed a question to Him. It was a loaded one. It had two possible answers, and either one could get Jesus in trouble. *“Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*

What would they accomplish if Jesus told them that it *was* lawful and right for them to pay taxes to Caesar? Probably turn the populace against Him, for the people hoped that Jesus was the Christ, the king of Israel. They expected Him to lead them in a holy revolution to drive Rome out of their land and to set them gloriously free. Pay taxes to Caesar? Not for much longer!

But what if Jesus called down curses on Caesar? Then they could arrest Him and turn Him over to the governor as a rebel. To all appearances, it was a clever trap, but Jesus' enemies were missing something.

Jesus was not the backcountry rabbi that they thought. They were messing with God in human flesh. Jesus saw right through the façade of their flattery. He called them out for their pretence: *"Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"* He stepped right around the trap they set and put them on trial with a question of His own. "Whose image and words do you see impressed on this coin?"

That question had only one answer. The coin bore the image of Tiberius Caesar, and the inscription, his name. Caesar ruled over his empire, including the land of the Jews. The currency used was his. His armies kept the peace by enforcing his laws. All over the country, there were buildings dedicated to him, for he was king.

Therefore, Jesus said, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” In other words, “of course, you should pay taxes to Caesar, for whether you like him or not, he is your ruler, charged by God with maintaining order in your country for your benefit, and that work costs money.” Jesus’ answer was a command that was clear and left no room for debate or controversy.

But He wasn’t finished. *“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* The second half of His command put His opponents on the spot. It confronted them with their hypocrisy. It exposed their false faith and righteousness. Whose image did they see in Jesus’ face? Despite their flattering words, they did not consider Jesus to be one who was true and taught the way of God truthfully. That was how they saw themselves and why they tried to put Jesus to the test. But they were wrong, dead wrong. Instead of believing Jesus, they rejected Him. Instead of rendering to God the honour He deserved as the One who so loved the world that He gave His Son as its Saviour, they treated Him like a charlatan, arrogantly counting themselves above Him. But they failed to entrap Jesus in His talk, and He called them to repent.

Whose image do you see in the face of Jesus? How well do you hear and practice His teaching in your daily life? Do you cling to excuses for your unwillingness to forgive those who have sinned against you? Do you fall for the sales pitch that yesterday’s possessions pale in value when compared to the latest, new and improved versions? Does the fear of

suffering tempt you to take the supposedly dignified off-ramp provided by our government today in the form of MAID? Do you see in Jesus' face, the image of the only true God, whose truth exposes the falseness of all our ways?

Whose image do *you and I* bear? Scripture begins by declaring to us that we were all created in the image of God. *'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'* (Genesis 1:26, 27). That all changed though, once our first parents turned away from God and trusted the liar who had put them to the test. After that, it is written that Adam *"fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image..."* (Genesis 5:3).

Sin stole the image of God from us. It has filled us with the vain desire to attain divinity for ourselves by our own works, and to cast God from His throne and reign in life as we wish. It is what finally led the enemies of Jesus to have Him crucified. Kill God to become god.

Evil though that plan is, our wise and gracious God actually turned it into salvation for us all. What Jesus' enemies meant for evil, God used for the good of all.

Whose image do we see in the face of Jesus? In Him, we see God Himself, for as the writer to the Hebrews declared, Jesus is *"the radiance of*

God's glory and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). In Jesus, the eternal Son of God was united with human nature, so that His life perfectly reveals God's nature in human form. Jesus is the image of God reborn! As a man, He fulfilled the commandments of God and all their righteousness, and He bore within Himself the sins of the world, making His crucifixion the atoning sacrifice that redeems all people. Jesus took on the image of fallen humanity to suffer and die for its guilt, and He was raised from the dead to restore God's image in us.

The Holy Spirit began that restoration in us when we were baptized. John writes of all baptized believers, *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:1–2). Through daily repentance from sin and faith in Christ's promise of forgiveness, we are led by the Spirit to live as those who bear the image of God in Christ. Paul implies this when he instructs, *"put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and [] be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and [put] on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22–24).

Whose image do you see now when you look in the face of a fellow Christian or even one for whom Christ died but has not yet believed?

Through faith, we see Jesus. And how shall we serve our Blessed Redeemer? By loving each other as those for whom our Lord laid down His life in love.

Please stand with me for a moment. Look around you at your neighbours in the pews. Who do you see? A newcomer sitting in the place where you like to sit? :) Someone that you used to be friends with until a disagreement cooled you on them? A person that you've been meaning to introduce yourself to but haven't gotten around to it yet? Now, remembering the kind of love the Father has given to us, look again: whose image do you see in that person? It is Jesus! Jesus, who became human to restore us to God's image. Jesus, who made peace for us with God with His blood, so that we can live together in peace and reflect God's image in words and actions that make Him known to others. Jesus is in us, making us more like Him. So repent of your sins. Christ forgives you. Love each other as He loves you. Amen.

