

**Sunday, October 22, 2017 – 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Community Serve Day**  
**“Treasures of God”**

Matthew 22: 15-22

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Text/Application Structure

*Adapted from CJ*

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Have you ever seen a coin displayed in a museum? It's odd. This piece of money is taken out of its context and put inside a glass case, and it invites your attention rather than your use. Separated from the sweat of labor and the dusty exchange of the market, this coin inspires reflection on its beauty, even as we forget its value at the time of its use.

In some ways, our text this morning can operate the same way. It displays a saying of Jesus, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” a proverb that leads us into reflection on matters of church and state. As we think about these matters beautifully captured in this saying, we may remain distant from what was really happening at the time of this dialog. Seeing the beauty of our Lord’s saying, we miss our Lord who was saying it and the value of his work here in the temple of God.

At this time in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus has come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. God has come to visit his people. Jesus cleanses the temple of those who change money, only to reveal the person of God in the temple changing lives as the blind and the lame come to Jesus for healing (21:14). Israel, however, refuses God’s visitation, and this is only one among many dialogs between Jesus and the religious leaders that reveal their spiritual bankruptcy before God.

Pretending to care about matters of the law, they break the law, seeking to entrap Jesus in his words. Later, in response, Jesus rightly declares that they have neglected the weightier matters of God’s law. In the temple, where God desires to show forth mercy, they have practiced malice. Where God looked for faith, they have fostered rejection. Where God has given them the blood of sacrifice, they have sought the blood of the innocent, and so the air is thick with irony. The religious leaders stand in the temple, arguing about money, while the temple itself is spiritually bankrupt.

This is most clearly seen the day that they condemn Jesus to death. They repeatedly fail to render to God the things that are God’s and are left standing in the temple turning blood

money over in their hands. They have taken Jesus, the king of Israel, and turned him over to Caesar. Judas then comes to them and confesses his sin.

Meanwhile, rather than attend to matters of justice and mercy, these false shepherds of Israel turn Judas away, saying, “What is that to us?” and immediately begin to debate, in all seriousness this time, what they should do with the thirty pieces of silver, as if their faithful service to God rests upon how they treat this “blood money,” when they have condemned their Messiah and disregarded their calling to tend to God’s people and care for their souls.

While the temple and its leaders are spiritually bankrupt, the world is now rich with the mercy of God. Outside the temple, outside Jerusalem, the true king of Israel reigns from a cross. Here, the treasury of God’s mercy is now thrown open and the priceless blood of the Passover sacrifice is now shed; God comes to redeem his people. Here, we see a true king, the king of Israel, doing the work of a servant-king. Jesus had said that his rule was unlike that of the Gentiles, as he “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). Through this merciful rule of Jesus, the world is forgiven and true disciples are formed.

Today, followers of Jesus like you and me continue to follow, rendering to God the things that are God’s: what do we render, you ask? We praise him for saving us, which he freely gives to all people and faithful willingness to attend to matters of mercy in the daily life of the world.

Because the reign of God is eternal – that is it has no beginning and no end, the church always faces the temptation to take this gift of salvation out of the currency of daily life and place it under glass for people to come and see. Like a coin displayed in a museum, the work of God is there for people to ponder, but far away from their daily lives. This gift is a treasure but it isn’t meant to be hidden behind a display case, safely tucked away. This gift is meant to be shared, to be used, spent liberally around town. We’re entrusted with the treasury of God’s mercy and we get to share from that abundance with our spouses and kids and parents, our church and school family, in our jobs and in loving and serving people around us, be they relief efforts from hurricanes or Metro officers or the people impacted through this Community Serve Day – or anything else that is within your reach in your daily life.

The website [reserveapotinheaven.com](http://reserveapotinheaven.com) sells tickets to heaven. While we might laugh at this website, some live as if that were the case with the church. For them, religion is a private belief about their soul's future with little connection to the dust and sweat of this world. Every once in a while, a false prophet will arise and declare the end of the world and people respond, coming to church to grab their coin of salvation and stand there in the world, waiting to enter the kingdom of God. Yet the reign of God is here, now, among us, and it has present as well as eternal value, ready to be spent and redeemed all over the place right around you.

When false prophecies do not come true, Christians need to be careful about their conversation. Rather than simply despising the false prophets, we are given the chance to speak the true words of God. God's reign is now, in your life, through Christ Jesus. God's eternal mercy matters in the daily life of this world. Our Lord rules over all things. He has established governments for the good ordering of life and he has created the church in his mission to give life to all people. Here, God gathers us in his temple, a place of mercy not malice. Here, he forms us to be his people, known by their love for one another, their love for God, and their service in his merciful mission to a fallen world. In Jesus' name, Amen.