**“God’s Things”**

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Psalm 96

Isaiah 45:1-7

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

**Matthew 22:15-22**

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus said to them, “’Show me the coin for the tax.’ And they brought Him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then He said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’”.

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

Bridge

Looks can, obviously, be deceiving, but how something or someone looks is, **often**, a reflection of how they are.

First **impressions** become (quite often) lasting impressions, and the impression that lasts is more often correct than it is not (things tend to **exude** their personality more than they **hide it**). While there’s, of course, exceptions to rules like even these, the rule is (to a large degree) a rule because, by experience, it proves accurate more than it doesn’t.

There are some who head to a restaurant’s bathroom (to wash their hands before eating), but gain (in that trip) an **idea** about the probable cleanliness of the kitchen. There are some who note excessive amounts of trash on the sides of roadways in particular states and **form opinions** about the state’s priorities and self-image by how they care for the roads they give us for travel. It’s always **noteworthy** on county roadways to go from one county into another and instantly noting the pavement change for better or worse. Rust-bucket cars often drive rough. And why engine condition often parallels a car’s exterior is a fascinating **similarity**. We **discern** (more often than not) by **appearances** more often **accurately than not**.

**Text**

Jesus talks about **image**. And here (in this text and in the Old Testament reading), He and Isaiah (and even Paul) **bust some notions about that** while **upholding others**.

The “**buster**” is Cyrus, a **heathenish** public figure of an enemy nation by **impression**, leader (king) and often warlord protective of his acquisitions, doing-so by force, acquiring more aggressively, **but noted by God as** **sanctioned for that conquest**. Cyrus ruled the world and empire gifted him upon this earth by (as Isaiah tells us) **God’s ordination (His preparation)**. “**I** have grasped your right hand”, Cyrus (declares God). “**I’ve** subdued nations before you, loosed the belts of other kings who you will conquer, opened doors before you, leveling for you exalted places, breaking in pieces doors of bronze and cutting through before you bars of iron. **I’ve** given you treasures **for the sake of My servant Jacob and Israel My chosen” (and here’s why and why you, Cyrus, are useful to Me)**. “I call you by name, I name you, though you do not know Me.” **Would God / could God** ever say such things about (for instance) Putin or the leader of the Hamas’ movement … or Adolf Hitler? That could **never be**.

But we have to **ask the question**, because “The proof is in the **Divine pudding**”, and, you’d have to say, world powers **have (sometimes)** demonstrated an ordination by God for an outcome blessed or civil (and these last three examples certainly don’t, much, account for any of that, but maybe **some do**).

**Cyrus** **returned God’s covenanted people to the land of that covenant**. **He** (**for God** by edict and by investment) rebuilt Jerusalem’s Temple. **He (for God)** provided dictates and funds to restore a Holyland, and **(to provide for all of that)** **God put him in the needed place with the needed power and wherewithal**. I can’t say that we’ll all find the man Cyrus in Heaven when we arrive, but that doesn’t mean that **he didn’t wield the hands and voice of God upon this earth for useful, freeing, results**. We **might** find him in Heaven, however, and that would be a surprising **cosmic** result pleasant, yet not automatic (and God can and apparently does sometimes) ordain His work done on this earth by pagan men and women. **Civil benevolence** is an ordained gift of God through, often, people pagan gifted the wherewithal to **be benevolent** as well as extravagant for their own sakes.

Our government (agree with its leadership or not) is a system providing for our police and military protection, for social safety nets and for virtually all the freedoms to publicly worship and dissent and vote for or against actions in ways legal and protected (**God gives us these freedoms through an American system of governance**).

And the very governance that put Him to death in as cruel of a fashion as it could develop, **Jesus defended**. “Should we pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” Jesus answered them **this way:** “**Whose** **likeness and inscription** is borne on its coinage?” “Caesars”. Then “**to Caesar render His due**” but (in the same way) **to "God His where His image is there”**.

“Let us make mankind in **Our Own Image**” God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit said and ordained and made to be the case from the very beginning. Cyrus ought to have **known better** than to think himself **his own**. Hitler should have **known better** the same, the Hamas leadership should know itself in **God’s** **intended image**. Putin should know himself that way **intended**. And you and I not just know that from created **intention**, but from **purchase by the bloodshed of Jesus and baptism into that and Him**. We’re **HIS**, “hook, line, and sinker” and **meant to look like that always, HIS “Holy Temple” as He calls those baptized and adopted to be “children”**. We must **look and resemble the part**.

Application

**We should probably consider** **our “kept-ness”** … for all the reasons that Jesus, here, describes.

Our Thursday morning study group / discussion is beginning this week the discerning of “**Two** Kingdoms **under One King**”. God reigns over a Kingdom of His **Right Hand** that’s called **His Church** (the first table of the Law, remember in Charlton Heston’s “Ten Commandments” movie that he, as Moses, came off the mountain with two tablets of stone with carved commandments from God on them, and the first table was of a **vertical relationship, man with God directly, and that’s us before God face to face**). God also gave us commands (the second table of the Law starting with “honoring Father and Mother” / authority / “Caesar”) as horizontal or civil relations are **governed by Him** **mediated by people, one to each other**. He reigns over His Kingdom of His **Left Hand** in **civility**.

Society tends, more, to resemble **Americanism** or **world-ism** than the **look of the Divine Creator**. Christians are to **be** **“IN” this world (or society)** yet **not be “OF” it**, but are WE, even, remember too often more of Caesar’s influence than God’s. It’s the reason for our confession … for renewal in forgiveness and restoration, reminding us of our image by His edict and will, baptized and redeemed, adopted-back and knowing that so, hopefully, **reflecting that** in an eternal way if not, always, in a “

Caesar (and the things of Caesar) are **highly persuasive and influencing:** the advertisement of “consumerisms” make most Americans more **“sheep” to purchase as directed by peer groups** than **“sheep” knowingly and purposefully reflective of God the Father**. Today we’re to remember the **difference** / the **contrast**. **Caesar / civility as a system** is **Good under God** … and He will hold it accountable in His judgmental expectation for it … it will serve Him or be judged for how it did not. **The “Things of God” (made in “His image” by intent)** are judged for **HOW WE LOOK IN THAT**, and Kingdom of the Right things are **eternal in scope** whereas Kingdom of the Left have a **temporal** **END**.

“Render to Caesar the things **that are Caesar’s**”, and we will pray (in our Prayer of the Church shortly) for our governance and care systems. God is in charge to **rule them** as **systems** and **blessed intentions** (a United Nations **concept** and **peace** for a Middle Eastern **citizenship** is part of that **intent**). But we pray, mostly, and receive God’s Word on this from His Son, Jesus, for a Godliness of the Godly. You are the Godly by creation and baptism and covenant (“render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and **to God the things that are God’s**”). All that you are **blessed into an eventual Paradise is God’s:** **soul, being, look, impression, expression, possession or care for things that you manage in this life**, **those all** are **“God’s Things”**. May the Lord grant us **that** **APPROPRIATE LOOK** … in +Jesus’ name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.