

Proper 24a

The Rev. Courtney H. Dale

Matthew 22:15-22

When the pharisees approach Jesus with a question- the question of whether it's lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, they're not coming wanting to learn. The pharisees try to entrap Jesus with a dichotomy- a false dichotomy. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not? They want Jesus to pick a side- are you with us or against us?

But Jesus responds in a way that does more than just win the battle of the wits. This coin was created in the image of the emperor and therefore belongs to the emperor, and what is created in the image of God and therefore belongs to God. The pharisees had enough theological training to immediately know- when we're talking about what's made in the image of God, we're talking about us, humanity. It's there in the first chapter of Genesis, God decides 'let me create something in my image.' And from that spark comes all of humanity.

So sure, render unto the emperor's what is the emperor's, but render unto God what is God's... it's a giving of ourselves as well as a giving of each other. These pharisees wanted to paint Jesus in a corner- would he get in trouble with the Roman authorities for bucking the law or would he get in trouble with Jewish leaders who rejected Roman authority?

In her newest book, *Braving the Wilderness*, Brene Brown talks about something called rehumanization. You've probably heard of dehumanization- the things we do to look at another person as less than human, maybe vile and alien, and therefore okay to hate. For example, decades before the Nazis began the holocaust, they spread vast propaganda, including children's books that depicted Jewish people as less than human, usually rats. These words and images planted the seeds of dehumanization that allowed and tolerated the Nazi atrocities. Likewise in

Rwanda, during the genocide in the mid-90's, the Hutu's often referred to the Tutsi's as cockroaches and therefore it was easy to want to eviscerate them.

Dehumanization happened on our own soil when we looked at another person of a different race and decided they had a price that we could buy or sell them at. Dehumanization happens today when we look at a person and decide they can be summed up in the word 'illegal.' Dehumanization happens every time we forget God's grace bleeds through any and all walls we might try to build.

So in her book, Brene describes re-humanization. Rehumanization is actively undoing the work dehumanization and it's offering to God what is God's. Rehumanization is looking at those around us and searching for the image of the divine in them- I promise you it's there. Rehumanization is watching the news and hearing about \*that\* politician who has made you roll your eyes more than you could count and remembering that they, too, deserve dignity. Rehumanization says that no matter how many labels we try to put on a person, the only one that matters is 'Child of God.' Rehumanization is letting ourselves be reminded and amazed that the same loving God who poured breath into our unique souls did the same for every last person on earth.

Maybe it can start in just a few moments. After this sermon, we will all say together the Nicene creed confessing our faith in ancient words bigger than us. Then we will pray together the prayers of the people lifting up our joys and concerns together. Then we confess our sins together, and then, fresh from the absolution- the promise that these sins won't define us, we'll turn to each other and pass the peace. Of course we have our friends and family, they're easy to pass the peace with. But I hope you find a stranger you can look in the eye and look for the divine. Or even better yet, I hope you find your enemy, someone you disagree with, to pass the peace with.

Maybe the Dodgers fan can find the Astros fans and work on our rehumanization.

Render unto the emperor what is the emperor's and render unto God what is God's. Just like the pharisees did with Jesus, there are still people who want us to believe in false dichotomies- that it's either us or them and we better pick a side. False dichotomies almost always come with a human agenda that doesn't look for the divine in all of us.

Who we are is defined by whose we are and we are all made in the image of God.