

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October

## **Matthew 22: 15-22 The Question about Paying Taxes**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

It is so easy to look at this passage and get focussed on taxes and the paying there of. We all love paying our taxes don't we?

When we look at this passage what we find is a strange fusion Pharisees and Herodians, very unnatural bedfellows, getting together for a purpose. Pharisees and Herodians were opposed on just about every political matter. The latter were ardent supporters of Herod who curried favour with Caesar and paid tribute to him. The Pharisees hated Roman domination and detested everything done within their occupied country. Consequently the two parties were argumentative on just about every issue. The enemies were united in an attempt to defeat Jesus. The same thing happened when Pilate and Herod were re-united in friendship when Jesus was brought to trial (Luke 23:12).

Jesus was smart enough to see through their entrapment and gave an answer that amazed and perhaps bemused the questioners who turned and walked away.

On reading this passage and thinking about the Pharisees and Herodians getting together it reminded me of a favourite Psalm of mine.

**Psalm 133** – How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity; it is like the precious oil upon the head running down onto the beard, even on Aaron's beard, running down upon the collar of his clothing. It is like the dew of Hermon running down upon the hills of Zion. For there the Lord has promised his blessing; even life for evermore.

I'm sure we all know of brothers and sisters who do not always get on, we may even be part of such a relationship.

After the line about brothers and sisters living in unity the image the Psalmist then focuses upon is that of oil and water; two substances that have an aversion to mixing easily. I am not sure of the scientific qualifications of the Psalmist but the image works. However Oil and water do naturally mix in an emulsion on our brow when we are hot either in the sun or from exercising.

It is when the unusual happens and divergent people mix that God brings a blessing. In a Church community we can be a mish-mash of people from different backgrounds and experiences. When we are united around our love for Jesus and we can put aside our differences and focus upon that which unites us in that we find a blessing.

That which unites us is greater than that which divides us.