

031818 Lent 5
Giving It Up: Politics
(But Not Social Justice)
Matthew 22: 15-22
Rev. Emma Chattin, Preaching

First Reading ~ Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. They sent their disciples to Jesus, accompanied by sympathizers of Herod (Herodians), who said, “Teacher, we know you are sincere and teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You show deference to no one, and don’t regard people with partiality. Give us your opinion, then, in this case. Is it lawful to pay tax to the Roman emperor, or not?”

Jesus recognized their malice and said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin which is used to pay the tax.” When they handed Jesus a denarius, Jesus asked them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” “Caesars,” they replied. At that, Jesus said to them, “Then give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, but give to God that which is God’s.”

When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Second Reading ~from Barbara Brown Taylor in
“An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith”

Because we are human, which is to say essentially self-interested, we are always looking for ways to add a little more authority to our causes, to come up with better reasons to fight for what we want rather than “Because I want it, that’s why.” If we can convince ourselves that God wants it too—even if that means making God in our own image so we can deny the image of God in our enemies—then we are free to engage in combative piety. We are free to harm others not for our own reasons but in the name of God, which allows us to feel holy about doing it instead of just plain bad. In his award-winning book, *Exclusion & Embrace*, Bosnian-born theologian Miroslav Volf says, “It may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference.” Citizens of the United States, which is presently the most religiously diverse nation on the face of the earth, would do well to pay attention to that claim.