Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The religious leaders challenge Jesus several times because they are focused on the earthly or civil realm while Jesus talks about the spiritual kingdom. In the civil realm, we must “earn” our righteousness, for example we are supposed to obey the speed limits or pay out taxes. We cannot rely on our spiritual righteousness to answer for righteousness in the civil realm since, for Luther, our righteousness in the civil realm was earned by following the law. Therefore, we cannot quote scripture to get out of a speeding ticket or to keep from paying taxes. When we consider our vocations, our callings, in the world, they are part of our civil righteousness.

When we deal with the civil world we are to use well-reasoned defenses.

The civil world exists because evil exists. God has set the evil world under the sword that it may be restrained, as men put bonds and shackles on a wild beast, and has instituted authorities to check violence and injustice, and to maintain peace and order. Thus, sin is the reason for the setting-up of earthly government. Luther expresses the idea by saying it was set up "against the devil." This thought is very characteristic of him, and we meet it in many different connections. The issue is bigger than that of power and responsibility for power. Luther regards our whole existence as involved in the combat between God and the devil. So, we should be involved with the civic realm to fend off the devil.

Jesus tells us the differences that exist for us as citizens of the state and citizens of heaven. Jesus carefully suggests that we owe the state exactly what is demanded of us. In today’s gospel, it would be the coin with Caesar’s head on it. By contrasting that with his asking for us to give unto God what is God’s, Jesus is exposing the irony of the Pharisees and Herodians’ religious activities; they are more concerned with their own power than they are with honoring God.

It is interesting how the religious leaders used their words while trying to entrap Jesus so they can retain their power. How they interact with Jesus their words First of all, they call him teacher. Indeed, Jesus is a teacher. When you look at his actions and words he was teaching, even on the way to the cross where Jesus becomes our Lord and Savior and redeems our sin. To those he was teaching about his mission to die for and redeem us, people thought of him as a teacher. Out of the 90 times Jesus was addressed directly in the gospels, 60 of those times referred to Jesus as teacher. I think when you call someone teacher you are saying they have something to teach you. It would be wise therefore to listen to what they have to say and when you ask them a question to try to listen what they are saying. The irony here is the religious leaders and Herodians are they are opposed to in in a political party in supporting the Roman Empire, have no interest in what Jesus is teaching them, demonstrated by the fact they are asking Jesus about something to set a trap. They ask what Jesus thinks by asking if it is lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor. If Jesus says yes this contradicts what Jesus said about being loyal only to God. If Jesus says no that will make him an anti-imperial revolutionary with radical ideas. They were hooping, of course, that Jesus would choose the all-or-nothing approach. If you give everything to God there is nothing to spare to give to Caesar, or vice versa. If Jesus falls into the trap they have set that means he will be attacked further by his opponents who want to retain power. Therefore, if his authority is undermined those that follow Jesus would become dazed and confused and perhaps fall away. After all, some may feel Jesus is too radical to follow while others are in danger if they do not pay taxes to Caser. They bait their trap by buttering up Jesus by 1) calling him teacher 2) saying they know Jesus is sincere 3) saying Jesus teaches God in accordance with truth and 4) telling Jesus shows deference to none since Jesus does not regard people with partiality. All these complimentary statements are true - it is why they said these things that did not ring true. Not taking the bait of the religious leaders thinly veiled attempt to trap him on issues of financial obligations to the Roman government, Jesus asked to see the coin, a denarius, one day’s wages. Jesus knows that the coin is part of the economy and is important people who are always living on the margins. Does Jesus respond in a way he would be guilty of treason? If he answered the other way, he would have been considered guilty of heresy in the eyes of the religious leaders. Jesus sees through their dishonesty and responds by issuing a challenge of his own—give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God. What does belong to God? if God created the world and everything in it, so God wants total commitment from us - God wants us to use everything we have for the glory of God which includes time, talents, coin and currency.

Listen to the words of Desmond Tutu “We are accepted and affirmed by God and so do not need to prove ourselves to him. We have been set free, and our liberation is total and comprehensive—it includes being set free from political, social and economic structures that are oppressive and unjust, since these would enslave us and make us less than God intends us to be. There is little about “pie in the sky when you die” in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for Christianity is the most materialistic of the major religions. There is nowhere that the writ of God does not run, for everything belongs to him. Caesar must be accorded what is appropriate for him, and God must have all—including Caesar’s domain; otherwise there would be a part of the universe, of life, that did not fall under God’s control.”

—Desmond Tutu

So, Jesus avoids the trap when he says “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.”