

**Sunday, October 22, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**“The Things that are God’s”**  
**Exodus 33:12-23 and Matthew 22:15-22**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, look around you, then discuss, “What belongs to God in the room/space?”

**Exodus 33:12-23. Context.** Moses communed with God on the mountain for 40 days and nights while God prepared the tablets of stone containing the covenant with the Israelites. Imagine Moses’ surprise and dismay when he finally returned to the people, who in the meantime under Aaron’s leadership had crafted the image of the golden calf and worshipped it in place of God – breaking the first two commandments in one fell swoop. In response, Moses cast down the tablets of stone, literally shattering the covenant. Moses unleashed the “sons of Levi” to slay the worst of the offenders. God sent a plague upon them. God had had enough: God promised to send an angel with the people as they headed for the promised land, but God would not go with them. But then Moses intervened:

**Matthew 22:15-22. Context.** After blasting the religious leaders of his day during his last week in Jerusalem with a series of blistering parables, Jesus’ enemies began to take more direct measures to eliminate him. This week’s reading records their attempt to get Jesus to alienate one or another of the political factions of his day. “Is it lawful [that is, according to the law of Moses] to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” is a loaded question. It refers specifically to the Roman head tax first levied in 6 AD and the source of insurrection that finally boiled over in the wars of 66-70. If Jesus says “no”, then he looks like a subversive revolutionary (that’s why the Pharisees brought along the Herodians, a pro-Roman group). If he says “yes”, he antagonizes Jewish nationalists who see Rome’s rule as illegitimate. The issue here is not primarily about the separation of church and state, or even paying taxes, but about trapping Jesus.

**Read Exodus 33:12-23**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

**Read Matthew 22:15-22**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

### **Read Exodus 33:12-23 again**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

### **Read Matthew 22:15-22 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- In the Exodus passage, Moses's relationship with God was like a friendship. He was able to engage God with questions, and Moses reminded God that he needed help with his assignment of leading the Israelites. What might it look like if you received a mission from God and you did not know how to proceed? Have you had such an experience?
- God said to Moses, *“I will make all my **goodness** pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'”* (Exodus 33:19a). “Goodness is not some ethical standard, some state of being, it is the empowering force that equips us to live as God’s people. It is a blessing. God blessed Moses on that mountaintop, just as God blesses us any time we let the Spirit fill us. ‘Filled with my goodness,’ God says to us, ‘you can be who I created you to be. What would it look like to live “filled with God’s goodness?”
- What did the Pharisees and the Herodians try to do to Jesus? (Matthew 22:15-16) Jewish people had to pay taxes to the emperor. If Jesus said it was lawful to pay taxes, the Jewish people might be upset. If he said it was not lawful, he might have been seen as encouraging Jewish people not to pay taxes and rallying them against Rome.
- Jesus said, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21b). What does this mean to you personally?
- “Give to God the things that are God’s. What is the logical next question after that? What are God’s things? There were hundreds of laws and stipulations determining what was sacred – fit for use in the service of God— and what was mundane – of this earth and therefore not sacred and not fit for use in God’s service. But Jesus wants us to take a different look. Everything is sacred and fit for use in the service of God. Everything, starting with us and everyone around us, belongs to God and therefore is a part of our calling to surrender ourselves to God”. How do you feel about the statement, “Everything, starting with us and everyone around us, belongs to God?” What might it look like to *give God the things that are God’s* in your life?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Wonderful God, you remind us that you have chosen us and favored us, and your goodness has passed before us. Help us to use your love in its many forms: chosen, favored, goodness, and more to help others experience your favor and goodness in a world that will try to deny your love and presence on earth. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.