**Discernment**

 **Today some of the Pharisees are at it again, trying to entrap Jesus. They even brought the Herodians with them. There were also some of the Herodians who didn’t approve of Jesus any more than the Pharisees. Both groups wanted to get rid of this person called Jesus they considered a troublemaker at best and at worst, a heretic. These two groups must have gotten together and thought about a question that would surely give them a reason to get rid of Jesus. But at first, they flattered Jesus by saying to him, “...for \you do not regard people with partiality.”**

 **This group of nefarious men were flattering Jesus, yet it’s absolutely true Jesus doesn’t play favorites. Wouldn’t it be lovely if in our time we all threated everyone with impartiality? Yet we know this is not the way it is in our time, and probably not in any time throughout history. Our times seem more contentious and we all know we are living in one of those more difficult times throughout history. Chaotic behavior runs rampant. What are we to do when blue and red colors separate us, and when we think about it how silly it that? What are we to do: the same things we’ve always done as people who follow Christ. Be kind, be generous , be a thoughtful listener and a thoughtful speaker of words. Donkeys and elephants and the colors blue and red can’t be those things that divide us.**

 **When people seek to become a priest or a deacon, they enter a process called discernment. It’s a process to pray and search inside the discerners heart, soul and mind to glean if the calling is real. It’s a long process and takes time and thoughtfulness. Jesus treated all people equally and he didn’t judge anyone. Yet he did discern, and after so many times of Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and Herodians attempting to trip him up, he discerned they were hypocrites and not to be trusted. We can do the same, initially show no partiality to anyone or any group of people. Yet if an individual or group causes you or others harm, we all have the right to do some discerning and walk away.**

**I think judgment is more apt to happen when we find ourselves looking down on another person. Usually for superficial reasons, such as some people are poor, or uneducated or different from us. Judging others has no place in our Christian lives. But discernment is a whole other important path for any of us to pursue when we find ourselves in untenable situations. It can be a good and necessary path to help us through difficult times in our lives.**

 **After the Seduces and Herodians said these complimentary words to Jesus telling him he was impartial to everyone, they then asked the question they must have thought and argued over for a long time. It had to take time for this group to come up with what they believed to be just the right question. They had no good intent, or care or regard for Jesus. Such despicable people who have only bad intent in their hearts to hurt another human being, will surely argue and picker for a long time over what question will cause the most harm.**

**It they could just get Jesus to say something against Caesar they could throw him into jail. They so wanted to throw him in jail, get rid of him before he could cause even more trouble to their secure way of life. They really did believe the question was sure to trip Jesus up. They thought it was such a clever question it would make Jesus say something they would find heretical. Then they could throw him in jail and get rid of this reprobate once and for all.**

**Here is the question they finally settled on, , “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not.” Just imagine for a minute how this group of men must have looked. No doubt dressed in the finest of robes, after all they were of the elite class of their time. They were highly placed Jews who didn’t want to lose their status quo. Yet Jesus saw their question was full of cruelty and he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites.” It amazes me why the Pharisees and Herodians thought they could fool Jesus with what they believed to be a great devious and clever question.**

**Right to the very end of Jesus’ life on earth, there were those who wanted him out of the way by any means possible. Among these groups were part of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, scribes and no doubt ordinary people just like you and me who also didn’t approve of Jesus. People throughout the ages who challenge the status quo become targets to those in power and some ordinary folks wanting to keep everything just as it is. Jesus was to some just another rabble rouser who needed to be eliminated to keep the status quo. There are always those wanting to do away with anyone who dares to speak out against injustices. Yet Jesus was not an ordinary man, nor was he a prophet as some believed him to be. He is the son of God and would choose the time and place to allow himself to be killed. Through his death he taught us there’s no such thing as ultimate death for any of us. Because we choose to love God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit there is no ultimate death for any of us.**

**Yet in our time as in the time of Jesus and throughout all of history, anything that is of questionable integrity or morality comes from the dark forces. It’s as simple and as complex as that. Because sometimes it takes a great deal of discernment on our part to decide what is coming from the dark side rather than from light. I have a small litmus test and this is it, if we have to use some sort of rationale for our own behavior or someone else’s, it’s time to discern what is going on. Is what we are questioning from the dark forces, or the light?**

**Light brings joy and laughter and the knowledge all shall be well. Even in the hardest of times, Jesus will always help us reach toward a place of renewal and hope. If we ever need reassurance, we can always turn to Jesus and there he will be ready to help us through the doubts or fears we might hold within ourselves. Amen**