

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost A
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 Who Are You?
 Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair
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Over this past week a movement seems to have started that has taken Twitter and facebook, and I don't know what else, by storm. It's called "Me too." With the revelations last week of Harvey Weinstein's misogyny and the willingness of many of his victims to come forward and tell their stories, millions of women and girls have also come forward in solidarity to tell their stories under the hashtag, "Me too." Heartbreaking, frightening, life altering stories of how they have been raped or abused. I have not experienced that level of abuse. But many women and girls, perhaps the vast majority of them, have carried the pain of abuse and prejudice and objectification by men throughout their lives. I want us to hold that thought as we hear about the encounter of Jesus with two challengers.

Matthew 22.15-22

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.

Jesus is being given two choices- either side with the patriotic Herodians and the Empire or side with the Pharisees and their religious establishment. Each of the two challengers represents one of these choices. The Herodian was a Jew who supported the Empire and its domination of his own nation Israel and was in favor of paying the tax that kept the empire in power. He probably benefitted from his support of the government. The Pharisee, although also a Jew, was quite different, devoted to his faith, determined to protect its power and status at any cost from the Empire and from challengers like Jesus. These two were opposites except in their desire to eliminate Jesus and his threat to their security and power and money. And so they asked him, "Is it lawful to pay the tax to the Empire? Yes or no. With whom will you side?"

If Jesus answered either way he was done. He would either be a target of the government or rejected by the people. But in arguments like these Jesus often recognized that the premise of the challenge, the assumed reason for asking the question, was shaky or shallow. When Jesus asked whose image was on the coin, and the challengers answered Caesar's, and that the

inscription on the coin said “Caesar is god,” he was moving the argument to a deeper topic, he was asking in whose image we all are made.

They were carrying the image of Caesar in their pockets, an image stamped on a coin that declared he was god, and Jesus is asking, “Whose image do you represent?” He was turning their question around on them and challenging them to declare their allegiance.

I don’t know about you but I have a definite resemblance to my ancestors. Pictures of my great-grandfather from the 1800’s show how we have the same cowlick in the front of our hair. I share a love of music with my grandfather and mother. And they passed on their love of baking to me and my children. The image of my family is deeply imprinted on who I am and I am like them in many ways.

Jesus is reminding us that when we are born we are imprinted with the image of God, the real God, who is made known to us by Jesus. In the very first story in the Bible, God says, ““Let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness...” The likeness of God was also the likeness of Jesus Christ. We carry his genes, so to speak, the genes of faithfulness and caring and healing and peace and respect and love. He wants to know, “Do you have God’s image in you?”

The Herodian and the Pharisee did, of course, but they had put on a different image, covering up the image of God. Their religious and patriotic zeal, self-serving as it was, had commandeered their lives and the image of God in them was missing.

You and I are made in God’s image and meant to show the family resemblance. You are made in the image of God who sent Jesus into the world to reveal what God looks like and to show how God acts. So, made in God’s image and following Jesus, we aim to be like God, the God we know through the Son Jesus. No, that doesn’t mean we are gods, it means we belong to God and imitate God’s son Jesus as best we can.

Remembering that we are all made in God’s image it’s hard not to ask what is going on in a society where half the citizens, women and girls, live in fear, and many in pain. Women are made in God’s image, yet many of them are fearful and wounded. And men are made in God’s image too. But too often that image in men has been disfigured and they have acted as though they are gods themselves.

I was speaking with a public school teacher who said that this week at school another teacher had reported that some boys were harassing some girls. They were saying things that were inappropriate. And this teacher who was reporting the situation said, “That’s just the way it is.

Boys will be boys. It's just locker room talk." But the teacher I was speaking with objected and said that was no excuse. If anybody in her community had the responsibility to challenge the language and actions of boys that are meant to put girls down, she said it was teachers like them and schools like theirs. If anything was going to change it was going to have to include them, maybe even starting with them.

We are a church of Jesus Christ. We bear the image of God, the same image in Jesus. In our community there is no place for behavior that mars that image in ourselves or in others.

Locker Room talk is not an excuse.

Boy will be boys is not an excuse.

"It was just words or a look or a gesture" is not an excuse.

"I am powerful or rich or bigger than you" is not an excuse.

"I'm a man" is not an excuse.

This church will be a place that is safe for women and girls. We are a community devoted to the ways of Jesus, ways that honor and respect and lift up and celebrate. This is a community of faith that is devoted to needs and concerns of the community around us. We hurt when we read stories on "Me too." We weep with those who weep. We stand beside women and any others who are harassed and wounded and dominated.

If you have been abused or disrespected anywhere because you are female this is a place where you should feel secure, and heard if you want to speak and be supported. This is a place where the image of God is claimed for all human beings, an image that guides our words and actions and thoughts and relationships.

At our house we've learned recently that another grandchild is on the way. In a few months there will be a new picture on our mantle of a grandbaby who was just born in Peru. And everyone will be asking, who does he look like? But we know deep down he will have the image of God imprinted on him. It will our job to remind him of that and dare him to be like the One who lived and died and was resurrected, and who showed us all whose image really matters.