

Lent Wednesday 3A (3/18/2020)
Entering the Passion of Jesus
 Chapter 3: Teachings: Risking Challenge
 Matthew 22:15-22
 Mark 12:28-34
 Mark 12:41-44

“They kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.”¹

If you knew that you had less than a week to live, what would you want to tell the people in your life? If you knew it was only a matter of days or hours or minutes until the authorities closed in on you with a bogus warrant and a guilty verdict and a summary execution, what would you want the world to hear?

Jesus’ Temple teachings don’t exist in a vacuum. They’re timeless, but they emerge from a context of worried anticipation. The Jerusalem establishment and the peasant rabbi, the center and the margin, Pax Romana and the reign of God – these tensions are about to boil over at Passover, the festival of freedom in occupied Jerusalem. If Jesus has something more to teach us, now is the time.

What belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God? Jesus demands that we examine our worldly allegiances and discern the impacts of our participation in systems. “The question of taxes to the emperor,” Levine writes, “cannot be divorced from the question of politics.”²

Which is the greatest commandment? Jesus demands that we examine our beloved traditions, complicated as they are, and discern the interpretive touchstones, that is, the principles on which we are willing to stake our lives. As Levine puts it, “We are always juggling priorities.”³ The question is: according to what criteria?

What shall I give? How much? Jesus insists that the widow’s offering, “all she has,” or more literally, “her whole life,” is more worthy of praise than the largest gift given out of abundance. What constitutes a faithful and generous offering of our selves, our time, and our possessions, in light of Jesus’ own offering in Holy Week, that is, the offering of “his whole life”?⁴

¹ Mark 11:18.

² 75.

³ 80.

⁴ 84.