

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

Whose face is on this coin?

Would you have known for sure who it was if you only saw the head from behind?

Do you recognize the faces of the people in your family?

Can you tell who it is when you see someone you love from behind them, not seeing their face?

Does seeing someone from behind have the same effect as seeing them from in front and meeting their gaze?

Can those you love tell when you approach them, even if they are not looking in your direction?

How might they know it is you?

The more familiar you are with someone, the more you pick up on the subtle clues of their presence, such as the way they move, the way they smell, the sounds they make. What are some of the clues we have to the presence of God?

We talk about drawing closer to God. Does it matter how we try to do that?

Why might you ever warn someone you love to stay back from you?

Moses asked to see God; what did God tell him?

<Let them respond>

God wants us in relationship with Godself and is careful to provide a healthy means for us to do so. How do you respond to that?

May we all draw nearer to our God and one another through sharing God's love and living in Christian community with one another.

Gospel lesson

We pick up this week right from where the lectionary left off last week, with Jesus having told a number of parables which the Pharisees confronting Him found offensive.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-taxes-caesar/>;
credit: LUMO

Matthew 22:15-22

NRSV

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to

pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?"

¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.

²⁰ Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?"

²¹ 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."

²² When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "I Am Thine, O Lord">

UMH #419>

Message: The Things That Are God's



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-end-in-sight/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Gracious Lord, we know that we are Yours.

As we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,

- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn better how to notice Your presence and to give to You all that we have and are, serving You for the glory of Your kingdom on this earth.
Amen.

We begin the final series of this Pentecost season, "The End in Sight," with a look at "The Things That Are God's."

"The invitation this week in worship is to adjust our vision. We are called to see God in the world in which we live. We are called to identify the things that are God's, including ourselves and the people around us. Even the surprising ones."



picture from Tiffany Miner

My older granddaughter, Vivian, has started teething. Although generally happy, she has taken to fussing more. According to her parents, she has taken to pausing sometimes while fussing, to look around and see if her parents are watching; when she sees that they are, she then continues fussing.

It is not as though they are ignoring her. Sometimes it takes a few minutes to clean up after or to prepare for giving her what she needs. But having the

patience of an infant, Vivian needs reassurance if there is a delay in getting her needs met. And once she is no longer uncomfortable or distressed, she is her happy self once again.

I think people are like that with God. We go through some rough times and we are constantly looking to see if God is paying attention, still taking care of us.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/moses-sinai/>

Certainly the Israelites seemed to be doing that after they got out of Egypt. But Moses takes it up a notch today, asking God for multiple reassurances that God will stick around, until he asks for something that God says is not safe. In asking to see God's glory, Moses was pushing boundaries, trying to understand exactly what this relationship with God meant for himself and the Israelites.

So God drew the line at a healthy boundary. Yet even then, God did not just say "No." God let Moses have a glimpse of divine glory, and Moses was so affected by it that his face glowed, scaring the people. The people were not in control, not even Moses was in control – God was in control.



picture from

<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-taxes-caesar/>; credit: LUMO

The same attitude was in place in Jesus's day. The temple leaders wanted to be in control, challenging [the divine Jesus in their midst] who was drawing [boundaries they did not like] about their behaviors and how best to honor God.

They tried to trap Him with a question about taxes. Jesus calmly turned it around, showing that not only were they not the ones in control - God is - but that they were to respect political authorities as well.

People do not like to feel controlled, but as we spoke about before when discussing the ten commandments, society needs a set of common expectations to follow in order for everyone to get along peaceably. Working together in community, we have better lives. When we get it wrong and ask God for guidance, God corrects us and provides channels through which we can develop healthy relationships with God and with one another.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to say that by all accounts, they were getting it right as imitators of Jesus, providing an example for believers all around them in Macedonia and in Achaia. So I ask us here and

now, what kind of an example are we setting for others? Are we showing evidence that we are God's?



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-end-in-sight/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

What is the focus of our lives? Are we truly putting God first, imitating Christ and helping one another grow healthier in body, mind, and soul? Or do we seek to be in control, not realizing that we may be hurting others in [our judgements of what is right or wrong without understanding the full picture]?

This week, I want you to look for the presence of God in your life - use those clues we talked about earlier - not to control God's gifts, but to share evidence of God's glory and grace with others. This includes (but is not limited to):

- † Living legally - working or otherwise do your part as part of society, paying taxes, participating in community events, voting (it's coming up!).
- † Taking every opportunity you can to show love, the kind that builds up the other person in a direction that they choose to grow, guided by God's grace.

You see, we all belong to God. And when you use the gifts that God gave you to nurture others, you are giving to God the things that are God's. May we all strive to do that in the days ahead.