The Pharisees went off and plotted how to entrap Jesus....

Well, really, do you blame them? They have been hearing the same series of parables that we have been listening to for the past three weeks. (They have heard “Many are invited, but few are chosen.” And “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit” and “tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven before you.”). It’s no wonder that they are angry at and maybe a little scared of Jesus.

And it’s not only the Pharisees, it’s the Herodians as well. These two groups agreed on almost nothing, but Jesus, in his vivid but equivocal descriptions of the kingdom of God, has managed to annoy almost everyone with any authority at all.

So, they plot to entrap him. Sound familiar? The tension between Jesus and the authorities—both political and religious—sounds a lot like the political situation today. The plan to entrap him by asking him a direct question. You’d have think they’d have learned—as Sister Susan pointed out last week, it was a direct question that prompted these parables. But apparently, they have not learned. So once again, they ask a direct question. Like the earlier question, their question is designed so that no matter what answer Jesus gives, someone will be annoyed.
But Jesus, as he almost always does when asked a question, chooses not to give a direct answer. Instead he redirects. As with the earlier question about authority, this answer—or non-answer—says, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re missing the point.”

So, what is the point?

Jesus’s observation about the coin does not seem to be an injunction against being involved in “things of this world” including politics. It does remind us that—like the coin—we bear the image of the one who made us. All of us. Even Caesar. Although it is fine—even good—to be involved in this of this world we also and always must first seek and find and recognize the image of God. In ourselves and in others. We must remind that we first and foremost belong to God.

While this is always difficult, I have to admit, I suspect that is going to be very difficult in the next few weeks. Our country is deeply divided. Most of us—including me—have very strong feelings about how the election should go. I am often angry and sad and afraid and frustrated at what is going on in the world today. But I—and maybe you—often let that anger and fear separate me from other people—keep me from seeing the image of God in them.

So, for the next three weeks, I am going to practice recognizing the image of God in everyone—whether or not I agree with them. Working toward unity rather than division. I’m not sure exactly how I am going to do this. Some of you know that last week, I made an appointment to give convalescent plasma on November 3rd.
I didn’t realize until afterwards that it is election day, but it feels fitting. It’s something I can do to help someone else—and since I won’t know who receives it and that person won’t know who donated it, political affiliation doesn’t matter.

I think for me it’s going to be the small things that I can do—like giving blood to help a stranger—that will help me remember what Jesus reminds us of today—that we all bear the image of God. Help me bring unity rather than division into the world. Help remind me to give my life back to God.