

Feasting on Gratitude

Stewardship Reflection Series

*Give therefore the emperor the things that are the emperors
and to God the things that are of God..*



Anger, fear, resentment, envy, guilt, worry. Many of us have these strong feelings about money and frequently don't talk about it at all. Jesus spoke about money all the time, asking us to examine its power so we can give our faith and our lives over to God. When I was asked to write about the story of Jesus and the coin, I decided to bring it to Transmission, my Manhattan house-church community of people in their 20s and 30s.

We gathered in a small uptown apartment, ate dinner, sang "Be Thou My Vision," and began exploring Matthew 22:15-22 with our hands at three stations. People circled the word or phrase that jumped out at them on a print-out of this passage. I brought a pile of coins from around the world with the instructions: "Touch the coins. Pick them up.

What images do they have? What value do they communicate? What do these coins evoke for you?" On another table, there was a bowl of uncooked rice, each grain representing \$100, which we placed in piles representing how much we pledge and give away annually, have in savings, owe to credit cards, spend on monthly rent, and on entertainment and socializing.

Next, a woman read the Matthew passage out loud. I reflected on how this text resonates with my own life. I do not resent paying taxes to Caesar and would gladly pay more for free healthcare and other public services. My work with Faith House Manhattan, a start-up interfaith community, means I give much of my time to God, but sometimes I feel like I have traded financial security for the freedom to do innovative, grassroots ministry. I wrestle with the specter of scarcity, even though we always manage to pay our rent, bills, and give money to God. I am still learning to trust in God's abundance.

A man read the passage again and each person shared. A public school teacher shared that many of her children in the Bronx are orphans because their parents got sick without healthcare and died. A young professional said he grew to resent obligatory giving to church as a teenager and now gives away almost nothing. He wonders how to overcome his resentment and give again. An artist, who tithed from his first allowance as a child through college, said he now struggles to give ten percent, but hopes to again someday.

We each prayed for the person to our left as a deep acknowledgment that each of us had been heard. The evening ended with song and laughter. Our time together -- reflecting on Jesus' words about money, sharing, and listening to each other-- took the edge off and helped us leave wanting to give God "the things that are God's."



Bowie Snodgrass
Churchplanter, Transmission Executive
Director, Faith House Manhattan
The Episcopal Diocese of New York

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it difficult to talk about money? What makes it easier?
2. How does your faith community support one another's efforts to find the freedom to be faithful in giving?