

True story: Sam was adopted when he was 5 months old. Sam was born in Central America and had been taken away from his parents because of their neglect. Then he lived in a foster home and that didn't work out much better.

He was finally adopted by a wonderful loving family—friends of mine in Ohio-- from the orphanage where he finally landed. In Sam's short life he had had to get used to three different caregivers only to be separated from them.

Now, you might think that a child of 5 months wouldn't really be aware enough of its surroundings to be marked in any large way. But Sam was. He seemed to have trouble trusting this new family. He found it difficult to be held for very long-- and while he didn't struggle to get away, he never snuggled into someone's arms either. He held himself-- just a little-- apart from them.

His new parents talked about it and decided that they needed to be patient, and give him time, and love-- and hopefully that would be enough. His dad began sitting Sam on his lap to watch TV, his mom would carry him while shopping. Months went by and there didn't seem to be a huge change.

A year later, they flew to see relatives for a holiday, and mom and dad sat on either side of Sam. He was fussing, so his mom picked him up to hold him after they reached cruising altitude. Sam's dad looked over and saw tears streaking down his wife's face. He was concerned. Was she OK? Had the cabin pressure bothered her ears? She met his eyes and then looked down at their son. He was snuggled up into her neck, holding her tightly. Finally, he had learned to trust.

Do you remember a time in your life when you put your head in complete trust on someone's shoulder?

When was the last time we put our head on God's shoulder - metaphorically speaking? When was the last time we melted in complete trust into God?

This morning in the Gospel we have the Pharisees once again harassing Jesus. They ask him— "*is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?*"

Jesus is getting just a little bit annoyed at these trick questions.

Take out a piece of money-- right now-- Go.

Coin or paper, it doesn't matter. All of the money minted in the USA has a motto on it. What is it?

In God we trust.

Do we? Do we really trust that God will really give us all we really need-- or will we hedge our bets and really rely-- in our heart of hearts-- on what we earn, or save?

I googled "making money in the stock market"-- 66 million hits.

I googled "trust in God". How many? Less? More?

240 million hits. Clearly it's something we would like to be able to do. But we trust money more.

So perhaps-- for Jesus-- the deeper issue of money lies in the power it wields over people-- how our hearts and souls are bound to it, how it fires our desires and our imagination, we dream about it, we fantasize about how it will change us, how we will spend it, how it fix everything that's wrong. We idolize it.

The question the Pharisees posed to Jesus -- it was a trick question, and he knew it. It's about the money- but it's also about so much more than just the money: so Jesus counters with another question-- as he so often does. He looks at the coin in his hand and asks, "Whose image is stamped on it?" This question is very important.

"Caesar's," the Pharisees and Herodians answer. "Caesar's image it stamped on it." Caesar, the image of earthly power.

But where is OUR power? *Our* power is from God. The coins of Jesus' day and the coins of our day do not have God's image stamped on it.

But God's image is all around us. God's image is stamped on *us*. We are created in the image of God. Imago Dei.

Does that mean we look like God? Of course not. I once had someone say to me I couldn't be a priest because I didn't look like Jesus: male. So I will say: God made

humankind in God's image: male and female, God created them. So being in the image of God is more than being made in the physical image of God.

I think it is more like when a father or mother raises a child in a loving, patient way, waiting-- hoping--- until their child finally learns to put down the guard of fear, and learns to lean in with love and trust. The image of God starts inside us and only then is visible to all.

So who *do* we trust?

Caesar is calling. Tempting us. Demanding our attention. Trying to tell us we can't LIVE without him. The coins of the kingdom.

Someday I hope we learn to trust God—not only more than we trust money, but enough so that we can lean in with trust, knowing that the One who supports us is greater than anything else in this world. And that trust will help us to understand that our standard of living is far less important than learning to give ourselves – and our safety blanket--away. Only then will people see that we are different. Only then will they perceive the image of God in us.

God is waiting for us to learn this. God is patient. Because the image of God will never be stamped on money.

The image of God has been stamped on us.

Amen.