

October 16 A 2011 God Inscribed on Our Hearts

Last month, I attended a Twins game.

It was stocking cap day. I got a free cap. Yes.

I was glad to get it because it has a Twins logo on the front.

On the other hand, I was disappointed because it had a Pepsi logo on the back.

I am glad to be known as a Twins fan, but I am not a Pepsi fan.

I don't want to be a walking billboard for Pepsi.

I don't want people who see me to think that who I am as a person has something to do with Pepsi.

It does not.

This summer, I was sitting on the couch watching TV with my wife.

I noticed that she had painted her toenails.

They were a deep, bright purple. Not their usual color.

Being purple, I immediately thought of the Minnesota Vikings.

The team was only in training camp. The pre-season games had not even begun.

That's real loyalty to your team.

So I commented to her about how impressed I was that her purple toenails were already cheering on the Minnesota Vikings before a game had even been played.

She said, "This isn't for the Vikings. I am honoring The Blueberry Festival in Ely."

Alright. I would not have guessed that.

This week, Minnesota honored the Lynx, the team that won the women's basketball championship.

There was a parade down Nicollet Avenue.

I saw pictures in the Minneapolis Star Tribune that showed people who had tattooed the Lynx logo on their arms.

They were proudly displaying their tattoos, announcing to their world their loyalty, their attachment, their sense of belonging to the Minnesota Lynx.

This silver plated tray sits on an end table by our couch.

We have a half-dozen of these trays at different places around the house.

We like how they look.

When we go antiquing, we are always looking for them.

Sometimes, we engrave our silver products to give them as gifts.

This one reads: []. It honors a person when they are recognized on a silver object.

We engrave other things as well.

This microphone owned by the church has engraved on it the letters GELC, the initials of our church name.

We want people to know that this microphone belongs to Gethsemane.

Engravings announce belonging.

Engravings make a claim of ownership.

Hats, toe nails, tattoos, and engraved serving trays and microphones all have something in common.

They are all about inscription.

Something is written on them.

A message is communicated through them.

The message is an announcement about belonging and attachment.

The message also communicates honor and significance.

Inscriptions mean something.

Inscription is at the very heart of Gospel story today.

The story begins with manipulation.

The Pharisees called out to Jesus and said, "Teacher."

The Pharisees did not consider Jesus a teacher.

They considered themselves to be the teachers.

They were just flattering him, buttering him up for the kill.

"Teacher, we know that you are sincere."

The Pharisees did not consider Jesus sincere.

They considered him a false speaker, a liar, a phony, a pretender.

They thought they were the sincere speakers.

They said to Jesus, "You teach the way of God in accordance with truth."

The Pharisees did not think Jesus spoke for God.

They thought they did.

The Pharisees said, "You show deference to and partiality for no one."

In fact, it was the Pharisees who showed deference and partiality.

The Pharisees began with a four-fold manipulation to manipulate Jesus.

Then they moved to the trick question.

You know what a trick question is.

It makes you say something that you don't want to say.

It manipulates you and forces you to answer in a certain way.

Here is the trick question: Should we pay taxes to the emperor, or not?

Why is that a trick question?

If Jesus answered the question with a “No,” he would be in trouble with the Herodians, those people who were followers of King Herod, the puppet ruler put there by Rome.

If Jesus said “No,” the Herodians would simply call over the Roman soldiers and have Jesus arrested for treason and speaking against the state.

If Jesus answered “Yes” to the question about paying taxes to Caesar, he would immediately become very unpopular.

The Jewish people hated paying taxes to the Roman occupation of their land.

The zealots were constantly calling the Jewish people to revolt and throw off this oppression.

It was only the threat of the Roman soldiers that prevented this.

If Jesus answered Yes or No to the trick question, he would immediately be eliminated as a threat to the Pharisees.

He called for a coin.

On the coin was a picture of the emperor.

On the back side would be various inscriptions.

They included: high priest, divine leader, son of God.

That was the problem.

A Jewish person could not accept those claims about the emperor.

Those claims are contrary to the faith.

The emperor is not God. Can't be. We know who God is, and the emperor isn't it.

To hold a coin with those inscriptions meant that you belonged to the emperor.

You were attached to the emperor.

You gave the emperor ultimate honor, significance, meaning in your life.

No believer could do that.

Jesus could not have such a coin in his pocket because he could not have such an inscription in his spirit.

Jesus did not give the Pharisees the answer they were seeking.

He avoided the trick question.

He answered the question not from a political perspective but from a spiritual one.

Jesus said, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

What are the things that belong to the emperor?

Taxes. Coins. Laws. Give the emperor those things.

What are the things that belong to God?

Take a look at each person. Whose inscription is written on them?

The emperor's? Certainly not.

God's inscription is written on us.

We are made in the image of God.

God has claimed us. We do not belong to anyone or anything else.

We belong to God with all our being, with all our talents, our interests, our time, our wealth.

In other words, with all our heart.

On Monday, I was making home visits.

As is my custom, I selected a Scripture reading from my prayer book to share.

I ended up with a reading from Isaiah, a reading that begins and ends with these words: [Is 49:1b, 13b, 16a]

Inscription. Inscribed on the palms of God's hands.

What is God saying through the prophet?

That we belong to God, that we live in relationship with God, that God and God's people are what's most important.

On Thursday, I was at a Pastor's meeting.

The worship leader read The Great Sheema.

As you hear these words think about inscription.

Hear, O Israel; the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

See, God written on your heart. Inscribed into your spirit.

Worthy of your honor. What's most important.

You belong to God.

Give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor.

But give to God what belongs to God.

