During the Second World War, German paratroopers invaded the island of Crete. When they landed at Maleme, the islanders met them, bearing nothing other than kitchen knives. The consequences of resistance were devastating. The residents of entire villages were lined up and shot.

Overlooking the airstrip today is an institute for peace and understanding founded by a Greek man named Alexander Papaderous. Papaderous was just six years old when the war started and he also lived in a village that was destroyed. When the war ended, he became convinced his people needed to let go of the hatred the war had unleashed. To help the process, he founded his institute at this place that embodied the horrors and hatreds unleashed by the war.

One day, at the end of a lecture, Papaderous was asked, “What’s the meaning of life?” Papaderous opened his wallet, took out a small, round mirror and held it up for everyone to see. During the war he was just a small boy and he encountered a motorcycle wreck. The motorcycle had belonged to German soldiers. Alexander saw pieces of broken mirrors from the motorcycle lying on the ground. He tried to put them together but couldn’t, so he took the largest piece and scratched it against a stone until its edges were smooth and it was round. He used it as a toy, fascinated by the way he could use it to shine light into holes and crevices.

He kept that mirror with him as he grew up, and over time it came to symbolize something very important. It became a metaphor for what he might do with his life.

“I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world–into the black places in the hearts of men–and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.”

In this story from It Was on Fire When I Laid Down On it by Robert Fulgham, we hear about the importance of a mirror in determining Papaderous’s call in life – what he was to do in the world, essentially what he was to give – for him that was a reflection of light into dark places.

In the Gospel passage, today, the Pharisees and Herodians asked Jesus a trick question about whether Jews should pay taxes to the emperor. In answering that question, Jesus looked at the image on the coin used to pay the tax and that image was of the emperor. Jesus said we should give to the emperor that which bears the emperor’s image. Then Jesus goes on to make a statement that takes the conversation into a different direction. In the context of his comment about giving to one authority the things that bear that authority’s image, Jesus says give to God that things that are God. Or, in this context, give to God the things that bear God’s image.

That brings us back to the mirror that was so important to Papaderous in determining who He was and what He was called to do. What happens if we look into a mirror? What do we see? We see something that bears God’s image. We see us. If we follow Jesus’s command to give to each authority those things that bear the authority’s image, that means we are to give all of ourselves to God – everything we are, everything we do, everything we have. Sure, as part of giving all we have to God, we follow commandments to be under earthly authority as long as it doesn’t conflict with God’s authority. So that means we pay taxes, we vote and we obey all righteous laws. But all of that is subordinate to what we are really called to do. As humans who are made in the image of God, we are called to serve God and to give to God first, foremost and always.

We are called to read the Scriptures, to pray, to discern in community the ways in which our gifts might be most effective. In doing this we might consider these questions. What experiences has God allowed to occur in our life that have formed us into who we are? What unique gifts has God given us? What needs do we see in our world or our community? When we answer those questions we develop a sense of what each of us, in our uniqueness, brings to the God whose image we bear and reflect on the world. We develop a sense of what each of us, uniquely created in the image of God, is called to give to God.

(St Johns) For some of us, one part of what we are uniquely called to give may be creating of quilts as part of the Linus project. (St Andrews) For some of us, it may be giving bushes and benches so that others can come to God in prayer in the peaceful setting of our garden. For some of us, it is in preparing food for coffee hours or fundraisers. For others it is teaching. For some it is in making large financial contributions. For most of us, what we are called to contribute is a combination of ministries we do (teaching, caring for others, building, creating, organizing) and goods we receive (such as money, extra clothes, books.) Considering what belongs to God (everything about us) and how best to share our gifts is particularly important now in stewardship season.

When we go home today, I invite each of us to look into a mirror. Whose image do we see? Even if the face we see staring back at us is older or fatter or balder than what we might like, the image we see is God’s. We bear God’s image and because of that we render ourselves to God. We are to give all of ourselves so that we can reflect God in the world.

Amen