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Sometimes you wonder if our senators and representatives have too much time on their hands.

As we have all noticed, the US government has been jazzing up over money over the past several years: adding color, enlarging the portraits (and Old Hickory looks very dashing on the new five dollar bill!), putting fancy anti-counterfeiting doodads in the paper. Now that makes sense: anti-counterfeiting. I don't know, though, if that's the reason why they've also been jazzing up the coins, or if that is purely for historical and patriotic reasons. Now every few months we marvel at a new state quarter, or pull out a magnifying glass to study the Lewis and Clark nickels.

And now there are plans afoot to revive the long-neglected one-dollar coin by featuring each of the presidents. And someone got the fancy idea of having the phrase "In God We Trust" stamped around the edge of the coin instead of the face. Very *avant garde*! Except that some of our elected officials have objected. They think that putting the phrase on the edge is a way of hiding it and posing an insult to God – or God's followers. With all of the pressing issues facing our government, this seems to be the most vital according to some.

I don't know where that issue stands in the House or the Senate right now, nor do I care. Personally I think having it around the edge is kind of cool, but otherwise I do not see this as a crucial issue of faith. Frankly, I do not look to my coin purse for religious inspiration.

And really if you think about it, it's very strange that we should put "In God We Trust" on our money. Why do crumpled bills and tarnished coins seem like a proper venue for such a statement of faith? We know what it really means, right? "In God we trust; all others pay cash." Money is sort of the opposite of trust. It's a cold, hard exchange of goods and/or currency. "Payment due at time of services rendered." There's no trust there.

I don't think our Founding Fathers – or whoever it was that decided to put "In God We Trust" on our currency – intended it to be ironic. But if they actually read their Bibles they ought to have been more aware. The Bible recognizes full well that God and cash don't really go together very well. As Jesus so succinctly puts it, "You cannot serve both God and mammon." Money, by definition, means there's not enough to go around. Some people will have it and others will want it. In our current, worrisome economic times, more and more people are finding themselves in the latter category. First it was gas, now it's milk and eggs – all kinds of goods we used to take for granted are going up in price, and we wonder if we have enough money to provide for everything we need. We're far more focused on the number on our bills and coins – is that a green twenty in our billfold or only a purple five? Do we have a Montana quarter, or only a buffalo nickel? And in our anxiety we completely overlook those tiny little words even though they are inscribed on the face of the coin and not the edge. "In God We Trust." Small comfort when the bills are due.

Yet that is exactly what Jesus was talking about in his Sermon on the Mount. Indeed these words sound as if they were spoken specifically for us in this day and time: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" I daresay this passage, with its beautiful images of the birds in the air and the lilies of the field, is a perennial favorite. Certainly it's one of my

own most-loved passages. But the beauty of the imagery and the simplicity of the message – not unlike those new colors and images on our currency – can distract us from those tiny words, that simple truth: In God We Trust.

The thing is, Jesus is telling us about the birds and the flowers because we *don't* trust God. Of course, like are senators and representatives, we would rush to protest, “We do trust God! God is at the center of our lives, not stamped around the edge!” But let's be honest: when we're standing at the gas pump, watching those numbers spin higher and higher – are we really thinking about God?

I think we confuse trusting in God with believing in God. We all believe in God, and it's no real virtue in and of itself. The real question that Jesus asks is whether we trust God. And all too often we have our doubts about God's reliability. After all, when tragedy strikes, how often do we find ourselves questioning God? How can God allow this to happen? How can God let so many people suffer? How can God let injustice trample people down? What kind of God would cause babies to be born with life-threatening birth defects? Does God not care when that earthquake or typhoon or hurricane kills so many people? Can God not intervene when it is human beings doing the killing, as in the Sudan or Tibet or that bad neighborhood in our own city?

Maybe most of the time we're able to retain our piety in the face of such tragedies because they don't affect us directly. But sometimes the grief gets the better of us, especially when it is someone we love who suffers. Why couldn't God cure my spouse's cancer? Why couldn't God have stopped that car that hit my friend? Some of this is our anguish talking, but underneath it all there is this uncertainty, this doubt. Is God powerless to stop these things, or does God just not care? Or maybe God is AWOL, not even paying attention.

Sometimes, though, our doubt isn't about God, it's about ourselves. In that case it's not an absent God that's the problem, but the looming presence of a God who judges and punishes. Then it is ourselves that we doubt. We have failed God somehow, and God is out to get us. We have sinned, we've done *something* to deserve this pain, and God is just giving us our just desserts. Surely at some point in your life you have had such doubts: whether about God or about yourself. Maybe your doubts were teeny tiny, like the “In God We Trust” inscription on a dime, almost invisible to the naked eye. Sometimes you banished those doubts to the edge, as on the presidential dollars. But I'd be willing to bet a new brown ten dollar bill that each and every one of us have doubted at some point in our lives, and probably far more often than we would ever admit.

But we shouldn't go turning even our doubts into yet another example of how God is going to punish us. After scolding his listeners about how they cannot serve both God and wealth, Jesus doesn't rain down condemnation upon them. Rather, he rains down assurance. “Are you not of more value than those beautiful birds?” he says. If God so clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire – will God not clothe you much more, yes, even you of little faith and great doubt?”

What then does it mean not to believe in God, but to trust God? To trust God in the face of illness or injury, or even in times of rising prices and bills past due? It means to look not for God's absence, but for God's presence. It means to look not for God's judgment but for God's blessing. How can there be a blessing in the aftermath of hurricane in New Orleans, a typhoon in Myanmar or an earthquake in China? Perhaps it comes when ordinary people reach out to help one another. How can there be a blessing when our loved ones are taken from us in death? Perhaps as death approached we had the chance to share with them how much we loved them, to share in a way we never quite managed to do in life. Perhaps even

if death came suddenly, we found a blessing in the way we decided to live our own lives from now on in that person's memory.

If I may be allowed to get personal here, you know that my aunt was killed in a traffic accident four years ago. There was a lot of doubting, a LOT of it, and I'm not ashamed to say it. God and I made it through, I knew we would. But yes, there was a lot of doubting. Now, my mother had decided that when my aunt's estate was settled, she would give any money to me and my sisters. It wouldn't be very much – my aunt was an actress in New York, after all! – but it would be several thousand dollars. I knew that I wanted to do something important with that money, not just spend it, but I didn't know what.

About two years later I was starting to think that I might like to adopt a child. But a lot of worries and anxieties – doubts! – held me back. Especially anxieties about money, and I got particularly fixed on how I was going to pay for any kid's college. I hadn't even told anyone at that point that I was thinking about adopting because I was so uncertain about the whole thing. But I remember the day well. It was in January of 2006. Church had just ended and I was sitting in my car getting ready to drive home when my mother called me on my cell phone. She told me that all my aunt's outstanding bills had been paid, everything had been settled, and even though she didn't have the check yet it would be coming in a few months. And when I hung up the phone I was mentally running through a list of what I could do with that money, how I could properly honor my aunt, and suddenly the thought just popped into my head: I could use it to start a college fund! And as soon as the thought appeared, I started to cry. It would still be several months before I'd really admit that I was going to adopt, but in that moment in my heart of hearts, I knew I was going to go through with it. And I did. And when the check came, I started a college fund.

It's not that my aunt died in order to pay for Sam's future education. But the point is that even in our darkest moments, even in our times of greatest doubt, God is always searching for a way to reach out to us – not to judge us but to bless us. It may not come when and where we expect. It may not look at all like what we were hoping for. But those blessings are all around us, all the time, like the birds in the air and the lilies in the field, they're in our pocket on our coins in tiny words – whether we notice them or not, they are there. So let us open our eyes. Look! Really look! In the book of Isaiah God says, "I will never forget you. See? I have inscribed your name on the palms of my hands." Not on the edge. Not even on the face. But on the palms of God's hands. In the light of such steadfast love, surely even we of little faith and great doubt can manage at last to say, "In God we trust."