

3. The Tribute Money

(Matthew 17:24-27)

*Then, said my Master, are the children
free. Which you might think
would tell us what to do*

*but we had caught the scent
of parable. So hook, so fish, the
money in its mouth,*

*the mucus and blood
on the money. I paid the collector
as I'd been told and part*

*was the lesson and part was speaking
truth to power and still
there's part left over.*

*From whom, he said, do the kings
of the earth extract their tribute?
Shining in its mouth as*

*shines the golden hair
you see to my left in the picture. From
the stranger, we said. But he*

*my Master loved said nothing, nothing
but beauty was ever required
of him. Then are*

*the children free. Now look,
I'm not immune to this, I like
to work the likeness out:*

— | | —
for *pieces of money* read
gifts of the earth, for *hook*
read *yours for the asking*. But as to

the one with golden hair, read what?
That some shall leap while others
crawl? That even

the best of love is partial?
The fish that flashed a thousand
colors, though you throw

him back, will drown.
Which makes me think
the gills in their air-scorched frenzy must
extract some tribute too.