

Message Manuscript for “Got Any Change?” Matthew 22:15-22
Delivered to Church for the Highlands
Sunday, October 19, 2014

Are you tired of the political TV ads yet? We don't really need any reminders that election day is coming. The creativity candidates are using to attack one another is a signal that it's almost election time. One approach used recently has been to show how a candidate is a flip-flopper. A video clip is shown of her or him making a comment, then followed by a strategically edited clip of the same candidate contradicting the quote. Both quotes, of course, are usually out of context and construed to help whomever is paying for the ad. Traps are often set along the campaign trail for candidates to step into for their own demise.

Some people around Jesus would have been great campaign directors, as they were masters at setting traps and had plenty of tricks up their sleeves for the demise of anyone who didn't agree with them. We see that here in the text (Matthew 22:15-22) we have just heard. A trap has been set for Jesus. The Pharisees go to Jesus with a pointed question about whether or not taxes should be paid to the Roman government; to Caesar. They didn't really care which way he answered it, knowing that there was no good way for him to answer it. If he said no, then they would have him going on record as an insurrectionist. If he said yes, he would get into trouble with his fellow Jews for speaking in support of the Roman government.

The answer Jesus gives comes with a brilliant strategy. He sidesteps the trap masterfully by turning it back on the Pharisees. He says to them,

*Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.”
And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.”*

It is then that their jaws must have dropped and their faces contorted as they realized they were the ones in the trap. Jesus had exposed them for doing something traitorous to the other Jews—carrying the coinage of the oppressor; of Rome. The worse part was not the fact that the coin had an engraved image of Caesar, but of what was written under it, “Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus.”¹ Jesus wisely draws attention to the shame of carrying a coin declaring someone other than God to be god.

Jesus then answers their question, saying to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” This was a statement so direct and powerful that we are still using it our common language today. Jesus contrasted for them the difference between the possessions of Caesar and God. While Caesar had conquered the world as he knew it and expanded the rule of Rome, he had nothing in comparison with God. So, Jesus

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Render_unto_Caesar

told them, go ahead and give to Caesar what is his—not much—but give to God the things that are His—everything.

We are to give to God what is God's—everything. What is that everything for you today? You may think this morning that you have very little, but a true assessment of ourselves would show that our everything is really quite a lot. The words of Jesus here invite us to look more closely at what we have, to count our blessings, naming them one by one. This is an exercise to see how blessed we are, but not to stop there. We do so in order to remind ourselves that everything we have is from God and it is to all be given back to God. That is a long list, isn't it? It is. It would take us a long while to go through, so let's just take a few of the things we all hold in common on our lists today.

First, one thing we have to give is our worship. God has given to each one of us the desire to adore, love, to worship. The Scripture and history show us that we can sure mess up this ability to worship. One way to measure how well we are doing with this one is to hear the invitation of Jesus to show him the coin we are using. Like with the Pharisees, whatever we may say about our God, the way we use our coins shows what which god we are actually worshipping. They were actually the hypocrites, not Jesus. We are hypocrites when we say we worship God yet our money shows that our allegiance is elsewhere. We are hypocrites when we say we love God yet hate our neighbor. We are hypocrites when we say we have only one God, one Lord, yet pay homage to our graven images, like the gods of our isms—nationalism, materialism, denominationalism, capitalism, narcissism, egoism, individualism, hedonism just to name a few.

What does it look like when you give to God what is God's with worship? Our hearts are full of gratitude and affection for God as when we walk out the door in the morning, connecting with and loving God as an offering. Our minds are transformed as we love God with them, using them for God's purposes and plans for the world. Our strength is fully God's as we offer our very best energy and effort in everything we do, knowing that what we do we do not for self or others but for God.

We are also to give our everything with our money. As Jesus says here in our text today, we are to give to God everything that is God's. God has provided us with money, be it a small or large amount, entrusting us with it to be good stewards of how we use it. Realizing that we are stewards means that we will try not to get too attached to it, remembering that Jesus said that it is the love of money that is the root of all evil. To have it is not evil. To love it is to veer onto a path of selfishness and ruin. We are to use it wisely. Using it wisely means that we will also give it generously, giving to build programs to help people, to offerings to help end hunger, to people who are in need, to a church that exists to bless the Highland neighborhood with the love of Jesus.

A third way we can give to God what is God's is with our service. Our tendency is to serve ourselves, usually doing so with everything we have. This is the lowest level of service. It is the most popular kind, one we are enticed to do by the best of self-servers and the smoothest of

marketing campaigns. We may fully intend to serve God and others first, but can so easily get wrapped up in our own needs until there is nothing left to give to God. Or, we may set out with great intentions to serve God but don't really know where to start. We may see it as something we do by ourselves, heading out with no accountability or mutual encouragement, resulting in the same results we get when we try to diet or exercise alone—inactivity.

Here at Church for the Highlands, we realize the power of doing our service together, doing so in teams and with focus. We have had a long list of service opportunities we've developed over the last four years, so many that it has been hard to fit them all on one page. At times, it has felt like our service has been a mile wide, but an inch deep. What you will see on the Teams list there in your pew is a shorter list, one with four particular areas for us to focus our service on in the next year. With our vision of having every member and participant serve on at least one team, you are invited today to circle the one you are already serving on or one you would like to serve on. Someone will be in touch with you this week to let you know about upcoming service opportunities in that area and a time when your team will be meeting each month. It has been inspiring to see what all you have been able to accomplish for God as you've served here at CFTH. And it is amazing to consider what all will happen in days ahead as that service continues.

Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."² Sadly, the hypocrites who tried to trap Jesus were making a living when they could have made a life. Let us set out this week making a life by giving to God what is God's.

² Quote found on <http://library.generousgiving.org/page.asp?sec=43&page=344>