

The Stung

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[0 : 0 0] Worship you to give thanks to you to read and meditate on your work. We ask that your Holy Spirit will so give us concentration and understanding that we may see the person of our Lord Jesus and by his Holy Spirit we may be instructed in those things which concern our salvation.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. There is a happy coincidence at work this morning in that the gospel for this Sunday in your prayer books and the lesson that I want to preach on are the same.

I hope that turns out to be a happy coincidence so that you can find it either in your prayer book under the 23rd Sunday after Trinity or you can find it in your church Bible, Matthew chapter 22 verse 15 on page 23.

You've all, I hope, heard of a very famous movie called The Sting and so I've decided to call this sermon The Stung only because there's a kind of parallel between the two which I'd like you to see.

And the one was the sort of setting up of a big time gangster for by some little time gangsters in order to take from him all his money.

[1 : 3 1] Well this is, I think the end of that story, that movie is that the audience are the people who are really stung. But in this instance the tables are turned as they try and set Jesus up for the sting.

I suppose which really was his cross. And he turns the whole tables on them and I want you to see how that all develops.

It's Matthew 22 verse 15 following and it reads, Well that's the trap being laid.

The Pharisees are taking counsel how to entangle him or how to trap him. It was a very simple word. It meant their purpose was to trap him and they are taking counsel how to do it.

It's not unlike, I suppose, the weekly interview that the Prime Minister and members of the House of Commons have with the news media in which the news media have carefully prepared questions in the hopes of thoroughly embarrassing the politicians.

[2 : 5 5] And you watch the politicians walk in and some very clever reporters trying to get them to say things which will make headlines for the rest of the week. Well in the same way the Pharisees were going to work because the media then was not radio, television and the newspaper but it was the daily debates that went on in the temple precincts.

And that was the media for those days not nearly as electronic or complicated as ours but the same human mechanics were at work there. And they planned a trap for Jesus.

And you'll see that he goes through a series of these. This one was laid by the Pharisees. The next one that we'll deal with next Sunday was laid by the Sadducees. But this one was by the Pharisees.

And having figured out how they could trap him they then got the hit men that were available to do it because they didn't want to embarrass themselves by a personal confrontation.

So they got their disciples and the Herodians. Now there were sort of three levels of government at work there. The fact was that they were under the Roman Emperor and he was the Roman Emperor.

[4 : 10] The Caesar was in total command of the whole country. But he had set up a puppet king or what seemed like a puppet king through the family of the Herods.

And this was discreet of the Roman Emperor because the Herods were related to the line of the chief priests and so they had some kind of royal blood in their veins or aristocratic blood in their veins which gave them some credence with the people even though they were really the puppets of the Roman Emperor.

And then at the more immediate level the government was under the direction of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. So there were three levels of government.

The Pharisees were in a sense not very well in favor with any of them because the Sadducees were the rulers and the aristocrats in control.

And the Herodians who were brought in on this were the people who supported the family of Herod and the family of Herod supported Roman authority.

[5 : 20] So they weren't very good friends. It's like liberals and conservatives getting together to trap the NDP. And they have to be in real trouble before they'll try that or before they'll submit to that.

And so that the Herodians and the disciples of the Pharisees got together and they were to go in and approach Jesus. So you have them as your hitmen in the story and then you have the setup.

And the setup was to go to Jesus while he was teaching and to put him in the position where they could in a sense lift him up among the people and give him a place of honor and then try and pull the rug out from under him very rapidly.

And the setup comes in these verses if you look at your Bible. It begins in verse 16. Teacher, we know that you are true and we know that you teach the way of God truthfully and we know that you care for no man for you do not regard the position of men.

And so by this flattery they thought to draw Jesus into some kind of exposed position where they could get at him more easily and condemn him as was their intent.

[6 : 42] What they were really saying is that we think that you are politically naive that you lack practical understanding and you don't know what crowds are capable of and we want to turn the crowds against you.

But they didn't say that. They said we know that you are a teacher that you speak the truth that you teach the way of God truthfully and you don't care for any man.

Doesn't matter who he is you're prepared to tell him where it's at. And so in that way they tried to set Jesus up. It told really in reverse if you take the thing and turn it around it told you what the Pharisees were prepared to do.

They were prepared to depart from the truth. They were prepared to teach the way of God in a way that inflated men's pride and men's sense of accomplishment rather than to teach the way of God truthfully.

And they demonstrated that they did care for men and for men's reputation and that they could be very much influenced by the crowd. So that though they were setting up Jesus they were also revealing something of the mechanics of their own religious system whereby they didn't stand too close to the truth.

[8 : 00] So that having been done they set Jesus up and then they put the bait out for him to take. And the bait was carefully laid and it was this question and you can see it when they put it into the discussion in chapter 22 and verse 17.

they said tell us is tell us what you think is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

Well it was it was an excellent question it was an excellent question because if he answered yes or if he answered no they had him both ways. If he answered yes the Pharisees would say blasphemy there's God only that you give that and that you give your substance to.

And there had been revolutionary movements saying that we're not to pay taxes to this foreign oppressor that has come in and is trying to rule over us. And they would set Jesus up as a as a kind of counterculture revolutionary as soon as he said no you shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar.

And if they said yes you should pay taxes to Caesar. Then they would abuse him from the other side so that the Herodians would get him if he said no and the disciples of the Pharisees would get him if he said yes.

[9 : 32] And so the bait was put in front of him and they were ready for the kill. And they stood there having asked the question. Well having asked the question then Jesus begins to tear their trap to small pieces.

And he begins to tear it to pieces. If you look at the text again you'll see how. It says first that he was aware of their malice. He was aware of the motives that were driving him to do driving them to do this.

That they weren't really interested in the question at all. All they were interested in was discrediting Jesus. And then he calls them hypocrites.

That is that they were play acting. And in the whole realm of religion most people well there's a great many people who are hypocrites.

We are generally regarded by going to church on a Sunday morning we're generally regarded by a lot of people who don't go to church as being hypocrites. That we are play acting.

[10 : 36] And in fact they may be right. Because we are human beings and human beings are easily given to hypocrisy. Jesus knew that these men were being hypocrites and probably the only person who knows whether you're being a hypocrite or not is you.

And the difficulty with being a play actor or a hypocrite and that's what hypocrite means that you're play acting is that you're not really asking the questions that are very much on your hearts.

I want just to remind you what I announced to you a few Sundays ago that our bulletins is an attempt to cut through the natural propensity for hypocrisy to which human beings like you and I are aware of.

On the front of the bulletin are two very serious children. And this drawing as I told you was done by one of the young people of the parish who has grown up in this parish.

church. And whenever anybody looks at it I think they tend to feel well why aren't the children smiling? Because children are supposed to smile especially in church.

[11 : 57] And the reason they're not smiling is because the person who drew this picture grew up in this parish and felt that one of the things she would like to protest is that children were never taken seriously and their questions were never taken seriously.

And so the demonstration on this bulletin is to show you that children have serious questions and those questions are to be taken seriously.

That children are not prepared to go to church to learn to be hypocrites. And neither must we because if we do then the questions that we ask are not questions from where we really are they're questions from where we're pretending to be.

And then the answers that will be given will be given not to where you are but where you're pretending to be and then you'll say well the answers of the Christian faith don't really meet me where I am.

But that may be because you're not prepared to admit where you are. So Jesus recognized their malice he called them hypocrites and then he asked them why do you put me to the test in order to reveal to them what it was they were doing.

[13 : 17] And you can see all the way through these later chapters of Matthew this same thing was happening that Jesus was being put to the test. And I would recommend to you that there is a very real sense in which you should put Jesus to the test.

By reading the record of him and by examining the claims that he makes about himself that you should put him to the test too. And you should be very careful to accept the results of that test so far as you are able to.

Jesus then having revealed their motive said show me a coin. and a silver coin was brought to him. Now the Pharisees wouldn't carry such a coin because it had this Roman inscription and the Roman emperor's head and they considered that to be blasphemy.

They thought it was against the second commandment to begin with and they didn't like the oppression of the Romans which was quite natural and so they wouldn't carry it. So someone had to go and get a coin unless as may have happened one of the Herodians carried a coin in his purse.

And so he took the coin and said whose likeness and superscription is this? Well it was very clear that it was Caesar's and it denoted that the coin belonged to Caesar in the same way that this coin is one issued by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth in order to give us the means by which we can carry on business within this realm and within this jurisdiction.

[15 : 03] And they were required to pay what would be reckoned as an income tax only it was a pool tax a head tax on each citizen and it was clearly understood that this tax was to be paid by each person.

And so having got from them the solution the answer that on this coin was the head of Caesar the likeness of Caesar and his superscription.

Jesus then answered their question and he said all right now what you do is you give to Caesar what belongs to him only he didn't say give he said you pay to Caesar what you owe him and this is his and you owe it to him and so you give it to him and that was enough to get him into trouble but then he went on to say but more seriously underlying this question is another indebtedness that you have and that is that you are to pay to God what you owe him that that's what underlies your life not meeting the tax obligations that you have only but recognizing that God has a claim on your life and that you must acknowledge that claim by giving to him what belongs to him there is a change in the words that you can't see in the English translation the implication of the Pharisees question is should we give what right fully belongs to us to Caesar and Jesus says when he replies to them it's not a question of giving at all it belongs to Caesar and you owe it to him your taxes are not a gift they're the payment of a debt and you owe it to Caesar and you can't deny that is part of the reality of your human life but then he goes on and says and in the same way you as a person bear the likeness of God because you were created in his image and he had laid claim to your life and as you owe this to

Caesar because it belongs to him so your life you owe to God because it belongs to him God has a right to expect that you will pay him what you owe to him Caesar will be satisfied if you pay money God will be satisfied if you pay yourself to him if you give yourself to him which he has a right to demand now we have in our society worked out a simple system whereby we give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar even though we have to do it in triplicate forms and even though we have to do it when you go to the gas pump and the grocery store and the drug store and the department store Caesar has it all worked out to collect what belongs to him but this business of giving to God what belongs to God is entirely different because God doesn't demand it

Jesus recognizes that the indebtedness is there and he recognizes I think very clearly that God sent him into the world in order that men might recognize that indebtedness and might meet it but it's never demanded it has to come from the heart in other words if you are going to give your heart to God if you are going to give yourself to God then that has to come from inside of you and the whole function and purpose of Christ's coming was to make people aware of this indebtedness he didn't come to tell them to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar they could figure that out for themselves Jesus came to tell us to render to God what belongs to him and that's the business of our

[19 : 56] Christian life Jesus if you want is God's tax collector you may not like that but it essentially is true that when you confront Jesus you become aware of what you owe to God and so the that which was intended to be the sting by which they trap Jesus ends up with them themselves getting stung by being confronted with this far deeper reality and that was the fact that they were not acknowledging that they as human beings bore the likeness of God and God had made clear claim to their lives and that they were required to render to God what belongs to God we sing him 360

BOW A Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[24 : 37] Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, forever and ever. All that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. I want you, just as our service closes, to pray for one another. Amen. That we may be given grace and thankful hearts and an awareness of the claim that Jesus Christ Christ makes in our lives so that we may render to God the things that are God's.

I want you to pray for the Cagio family of St. Mary's Parish or St. Faith's Parish in their bereavement. God might wonderfully provide for and blessed them in their very real need.

[26 : 00] We pray for all the confirmation candidates in our parish. They may become the disciples of Jesus Christ.

We pray for those in positions of responsibility, trustees of the church committees and various committees.

Monday Church Club staff, choir, and all who carry on the ministry of music in this parish. Be clearly as they prepare for the Advent carol service.

We pray for Fran, who is Fran Fraser, who is in hospital in Prince George.

God might be very much with her this day and tomorrow. In particular, pray for all those who are in the hospital.

[27 : 04] God's gracious mercy and protection we commit you.

The Lord bless you and keep you and make his face to shine upon you and be brave of some of you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Now and evermore. Amen. Remember 484.

God's musicpiel. The Lord bless you and keep you and pl workshops. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 07] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.