

“Truth Telling Can be Light-hearted”

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matthew 22:15-22 at SALC, 10/18/2026

Truth telling can have humor! God has a great sense of humor! I am always tickled at the humor of Jesus – a tongue in cheek humor. I can imagine His sarcasm with a straight face. Followed perhaps with laughter when He was alone with his disciples. Even when Jesus is reprimanding someone – friend or foe – his humor comes out.

In the text today, the Herodians (politicians) and the religious were attempting to trick Jesus into sounding treasonous. This is not unusual throughout history – people working for good and those who speak too loudly for peace face trickery and traps to make them sound treasonous. Lutherans are amongst those who are often referred to as “so un-American” because we stand up for justice. When the conservative religious and political leaders ask us if we support illegal border crossings and the like, in an effort to say that we do not support law and order, perhaps our answer, using Jesus’s approach should be, “How many of you would not be here if places like Ellis Island were not set up to process illegal immigrants and refugees without papers?” They wouldn’t answer for fear of losing supporters. Then we’d talk about the Christian hospitality to the migrant and refugee.

Perhaps that was too serious? We should just say, “Good luck with getting your roof fixed or your landscaping done on time. It’s going to take a while to train our new “refugees”, like the Afrikaaners from South Africa to learn to do that!”

John the Baptist is described as a prophet who went all in – pedal to the metal. He was full of woes and warnings. He spoke the part, lived the part - mostly in the desert - he dressed the part, and he even ate the part – he ate organic - organic locusts and local honey! Some want to aspire to that, forgetting that most importantly though, John spoke truth to power and he called people to repent and follow the Messiah, Jesus. John was intense. Jesus shows another model,

though, even with the same, if not greater intensity for Truth and the call for repentance.

Jesus too had His Woe chants and slogans. His woes are classic. My favorite in Matthew 23's seven woes:

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." says Jesus to them.

Whitewashed tombs! All nice and pretty on the outside – marble and granite – but inside full of dead person's bones. Jesus even says that the tombs are stinky and unclean on the inside – take in that graphic picture. Then Jesus says, "That's how you are!" He was talking about the hypocrisy of the outward show while the heart is rotten. The proclamation from Jesus is to the point, addressing a fundamental wrong in society, yet taught with sarcasm and humor.

Often we feel that if we want to be prophetic to God's Truth in the World, we have to be serious and intense. Tell me about it - that was me for most of my life. I was getting the truth out as a prophetic witness, earning the accolades for that witness but getting burnt out. Then it seems the Lord directed me to watch stand-up comedy - to help me out.

Now don't be waylaid by my reference to stand-up comedians. I'm not trying to be one, so you won't start hearing profanities. But look at the creativity of comics to utter profundities about real issues – they tell the truth and still make people laugh. I look at that and see the creativity and comedy of Jesus, as The Lord proclaims the truth.

When you embrace the Truth of the Gospel, when you own it, make it part of who you are, then you are not all so wound up that you cannot communicate it with confidence and even light-hearted humor.

So back to the text as I wrap up. The politicians and Jewish religious leaders want to trap Jesus so they ask Jesus whether His disciples, who seem to be anti-establishment, should pay taxes. To make him guilty of not just blasphemy, as he was later charged with, but for treason too. This was a serious attempt by the religio-political lobby to subvert the Truth. Jesus would obviously not have it. So he says, bring me a coin that equals the tax – worth a day's work. They brought him a denarius. He asked, who's head is on this? They said Caesar's. So he said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar!"

Was Jesus really trying to say that if a person's head is on a coin, it belongs to him/her? Imagine how many quarters George Washington or his museum would have today! Jesus was being tongue in cheek. It's interesting that the narrative says the questioners went away amazed, astonished or stumped, "caught" says another translation, like "cat got your tongue?". His disciples must have laughed. Yet, the truth was proclaimed.

We are called as Church to bear witness to the Truth. Give to the world and the rulers what belongs to the world... give to your job, what belongs to your job; BUT give to God what belongs to God. And what belongs to God? Our entire being, our heart and soul belongs to God. Deny yourself and follow Jesus. We don't want to tell people that, we don't want to "evangelize" with that message. Also some don't want to be seen as the intense nerd, so we say, let people be. Let them find faith by looking at us doing good. Yet Jesus calls us to go tell! Tell the world the truth. If Jesus is good to and for you, let's be unselfish and share it. If it's uncomfortable to share, let's take a page from Jesus. You can be creative in witnessing, even humorous. Relax a little. It's not your truth, nor your reputation that's at stake. Don't stress about how to be a witness. Just don't put a gag on talk about faith, Jesus and church. God takes our words and actions, like seeds sown in love and makes it move the hearts of others. That's the work of The Spirit, watering the ground by Grace. Imagine watering the ground that has no seeds, and waiting for the harvest! That's not us. Amen