

## 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2014

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-22

Sermon: "Mine, Mine, Mine"

I love animated Disney movies. In fact, I own most of them. Among my favorites is "Finding Nemo" – which is the story of the misadventures of a clownfish trying to get back home. There are a lot of great characters in this film. I am especially fascinated by the flocks of seagulls. Their loud chatter repeats these words again and again ... *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.*

Those seagulls sound an awful lot like the religious leaders in our gospel reading today. They are mostly concerned with *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* The Pharisees are worried about losing their power and control over the people. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* They are afraid of this Jesus who keeps gaining in popularity. Large crowds are following Him and listening to Him. The Pharisees can see their own authority slipping away. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* Jesus has been outspoken in His challenge to the Pharisees – pointedly questioning their leadership again and again. The Pharisees have begun to wonder how many of the people are laughing at them behind their backs. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* And, so the Pharisees lay a trap for Jesus. Their fear of this Jesus knows no bounds. They team up with their rivals – the Herodians. The only thing these two groups of leaders have in common is their mutual hatred of Jesus. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.*

The plan is calculated and simple. Ask Jesus a lose/lose question. Ask Jesus a question that no matter what His answer – He will get in trouble with His followers or the Roman government. It did not really matter. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* But, let's first start with a little insincere flattery. "Jesus." They begin. "We know you are a man of integrity. You are a great teacher. You are not swayed by popular opinion. You are a man of honesty." And then they hit Him with THE big question..."So, is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* And, then the religious leaders sit back and smile smugly. Because they know that they've got Him. They have backed this Jesus into a corner. No matter what He answers this Jesus will be a loser. And, they – the Pharisees will be winners once again. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.*

They are blind to the fact that this is Jesus the Christ. He immediately sees through the scam. He asks for a coin – a denarius. And although this is a coin that the Pharisees should not even be carrying – as it against their many rules and principles – they have on their person this very coin. Those people gathered can see the religious leaders pulling out the coin and handing it to the lowly teacher. “Why are you playing games with me?” Jesus demands. “Whose name is on this coin? Whose image is this?” He asks. “It is, of course, the Emperor Caesar.” They respond. “Fine.” Jesus replies. “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. And give to God what is God’s.” The Pharisees are rendered speechless by this response. They leave, simply shaking their heads. The echoes of *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* seem to have disappeared altogether.

The amazing thing about the words of Jesus – is that 2,000 years later they still speak truth into our hearts and lives. Because, let’s face it we are also a lot like those annoying squawking seagulls of “Finding Nemo” fame. *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* We love our houses, our cars, our bikes, our stuff. And even though we may complain from time to time, we are proud of our families, our schools, our jobs, our retirement. We have no intention of giving up our freedoms, our security, our investments. It sounds an awful lot like *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* all the time. In addition to that we are pulled in all directions by the *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* of those around us – our parents, children and grandchildren; our friends, neighbors and co-workers; the people in our community and in our church. We can feel owned by so much stuff and so many people.

But to whom do we really belong? Sometime it seems like we also belong to Caesar. So much – so many – pulling and tugging at us continually. And, in the midst of all of that Jesus says, “Give to God what is God’s.” The truth of the matter is – in spite of our squawking *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* – it all belongs to God. All of it. All of us. Thank God. We belong to God in all of our being, with all of our talents, interests, time and yes, even money. It’s not *Mine.* It’s His.

That coin in the gospel reading was inscribed with a name and an image – that of Caesar. We too are inscribed with an image. In fact, we are created in the image of God. God made us in God’s own image and then claims us. Take a look at the people seated around you. *(Pause)* We are also inscribed with a name. That name is “Child of God”. Many of us here have been inscribed – marked with the cross of Christ – at our baptism.

We belong to none other than the ultimate Caesar – God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. And God says, every day in countless ways: “You are *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.* Nothing can destroy my love for you. No matter where you wander or how much you might screw up. You are *Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine.*” Amen.