

I can remember the times when I was younger, and when my mom would come to pick me up from my friend's house or the pool, she would tell me to pack up my things, then, while I got my stuff ready, she would talk to my friend's mom. I would ask her "How much longer are you going to talk to her?" She would kindly respond "Oh just one more minute." One minute became two minutes, then 5, then 10, and 20 minutes later, a lifetime for a young Sam, she finally grabs her keys off the table and we head home.

We've all been tricked at some point. Whether you have believed someone's lie or someone took something from you, every person here has been a subject to someone else's dishonesty.

In the gospel, we hear the story of the Pharisees attempting to trick Jesus. They want him out of their church, and they thought, this time, they had Jesus for sure. Woven into their question of taxes, they made a lose-lose situation for the two possible answers. Either he could say paying taxes was okay, which would be enough for them to accuse him of heresy and kick him out of the church, or he could say paying taxes isn't okay, which would leave him subject to the Roman government for openly saying not to pay taxes.

Jesus knew of this scheme, so when they approached him and asked the question, he had developed a perfect response. He asked to see the coin with

which they paid the tax: a denarius. The denarius was the only currency accepted by the Roman government to pay the tax. When Jesus saw it, he told them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

Jesus's answer to the question gave the Pharisees nothing with which they could prosecute him; Jesus had won again.

Though Jesus was the son of God, on Earth, he was the same as you and me in many ways. He experienced conflict, just like us: people or things tried to take him from his path just as people have tried to take us from our own. Now, I'm not saying people are going to come running up to you, asking for your commentary on tax evasion, but I am saying that you have goals for yourself, and if you don't see them, God does. God has a plan for you, and even though you can't always see it, it's there. Try to think of a goal that you have set for yourself, whether it's for this week, next month, or years away. I for one am doing lots to prepare for college, though another personal goal of mine is to start planning out my time better. Again, they come in all shapes and sizes. Your goal could be anything from walking the dog to applying for a new job.

Though there's always a goal set for you, there's also bound to be obstacles. Obstacles come in all shapes and sizes, but they have one consistency: they will try to get in the way of your goals. Like Jesus, you can

overcome these obstacles by seeing when they're coming. Of course, you don't have the ability to see the future, but God has put the stepping stones in place for you.

No one in the world could have predicted the way things have unfolded these past months, but through God's love and strength, we've all managed to make it through; not because someone predicted it would happen months before and everyone prepared, but when the world needed help and didn't know where to go, God worked through each and every one of us to adapt safely and effectively.

Another aspect of this story is the coins, as well as what Jesus says at the end of the gospel. Though you should pay your taxes, that's not what I'm talking about. These coins could represent something different today than their original place in the scripture. For instance, your tax to Caesar is a responsibility that Caesar has laid out. Caesar could be many things, but for the purpose of this sermon, we'll say Caesar represents your responsibilities to the people around you right now. This means when Jesus says "give to the emperor what is the emperor's," it could mean to fulfill all your responsibilities to the people around you: your boss, parents, loved ones. Do the tasks that you are asked to do by others, to "pay your taxes" to them.

Now that we addressed what it means to pay your taxes to the emperor, this leaves us to ponder what Jesus meant when he said “give to God what is God’s.” From what we said earlier of Caesar, this should mean that we also must complete the tasks to which God has called us. This is correct, but can also be a little vague. My responsibilities to God look a lot different than yours, your neighbor, Deacon Julie Stecker, and Bishop Bill Gohl. This raises the question: how do I know my responsibilities to God? The best answer I can give you is, you don’t have to know. It isn’t our job to know the things that God wants us to do, only to do them. If God has laid out the path for you, you can walk with him to fulfill what he has called you to.

The best part is, we don't have to choose if we're faithful to God or others or our obligation as citizens - we can be faithful to all of them. We are all on our way to these goals right now, because, as I said before, God has laid out the path, so all we have to do is follow the path where we sense God’s presence. God may call out to you in many forms, like people or events. Walk with his love, his faith, and his strength, and if you do that, you’ll reach all of your goals and God’s goals for you. Have faith in the path God has called you to, and that he has laid out the path, with signs along the way. And with that, let us pray.