

“ENTANGLING GOD TO GET WHAT HE WANTS!”

Sermon Text – Mt. 22:15-22
Pentecost 18, Proper 24,A
Zion Lutheran Church – Beecher, IL
Sunday & Wednesday, October 16 & 19, 2011
OT Reading – Isaiah 45:1-7
Epistle Reading – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Gospel Reading – Matthew 22:15-22

In the name of Jesus. [Amen.]

Our sermon is primarily based on the first verse of today’s Gospel reading. I’ll re-read that now: **Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his talk.** (Mt. 22:15, ESV)

Dear friends in Christ,

We see this all the time, don’t we? Whether it’s in national politics or that person with whom you don’t get along all that well... people aggressively look for ways to “entangle” others in their own words. They look for that moment when they can say: **“Aaa haaa! I caught you! You said the wrong thing... and now I’m going to use that against you!”**

For example, President Gerald Ford used a poor choice of words in a debate with Jimmy Carter... and Ford’s words were used against him over and over... resulting in his defeat in the 1976 Presidential election.

And here before us in today’s Gospel reading, we have evil men attempting to do the same thing – to entangle, or trap Jesus in His words. But, as Jesus so often does, He turns their evil intentions into something good! He uses their evil to demonstrate for us the way we ought live according to the faith given to us in our Baptism.

As we’ve said, the Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to get the goods on Him. But, of course, Jesus easily saw their evil plan and asked them: **“Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?”** (v. 18)

Just like it is with everyone – including you and me – no one... *no one*... pulls anything over on Jesus!

Yet, the thing that our God doesn’t want from these rascallions... *is exactly* the thing He wants from you!

Did you get that...? He *wants* you to **“entangle Him in His talk;”** that is, in His words! He *wants* to be **“entangled”** – but only in *His* way... and it’s all for your benefit!

Let me explain...

The Pharisees hated Jesus. They were His avowed enemies and they were always looking for a way to destroy Him. They saw that they were losing their social position... along with power and prestige among the people as Jesus and His message of God’s love became more and more popular with the people.

And so the Pharisees hatched their trap... trying to entangle Him. If they could get Jesus to say that the people needed to pay taxes to the hated Romans... then His followers would desert Him. And... if He told the people to *not* pay their taxes, then the Romans would come after Him with every intention of killing Him, and thus make an example of Him so no one else got such ideas! And so... the Pharisees sought to use Jesus' words to destroy Him... one way or the other.

At other times... back then... *and perhaps even more so today*... people attempt to entangle God in His words in order to get what they think they want. Some people think that they have an angle on it all. They reason: **“Well, God loves all people. Because of that it doesn't matter how I live my life. I can do whatever I want – ignoring some of those “pesky” commandments. And I'll go to church if and when I want to. I can do all that, because He's a God of love. He *has* to accept me – whether I live decently or not.”**

To such people... no matter how brazen they are... demanding God's gifts on their own terms; that is, without repentance... to such people, Jesus, on the Day of Judgment will say: **“Depart from me, you cursed (ones), into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** (Mt. 25:41, ESV)

Yet just as surely as there is the wrong... and totally futile way of attempting to entangle God in His words... *so also* is there a proper way... *a God-pleasing way*... of trapping Him in His words.

You see, that which God *abhors* from those who hate Him... is the same thing that He *loves* from you who love Him! Remember... He *wants* you to **“entangle Him in His words.”**

Consider the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed (Matthew 15:21-28). When she begged Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus acted like He wouldn't help her. He said: **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs”** (Matthew 15:24, 26).

And with that, the woman entangled Jesus in His words, and did so, in the way that He loves. She knew that the God of Israel *was also* the Savior of All Nations. And so she entangled Him in His own words: **“Yes, Lord,”** she said, **“but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”** (Mt. 15:27, ESV).

Did you see it? By her tenacious faith, our Lord is taken captive and held to His promise – *just as He desires!* Jesus got trapped... with the blessed result... that God in Christ said to her: **“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”** (Mt.15:28, ESV). Her dear daughter was healed!

So it is with *you*... beloved of God! God in Christ has spoken the same eternal promises to you as He spoke to the Canaanite woman and to *all* of His people of *all* times.

When you suffer loneliness and doubt... entangle Jesus in His words! Boldly remind Him of His promise to you: **“Lord, You *promised* me that You will never leave me or forsake me. You swore to me on the day of my Baptism that You've made me Your beloved child. Be with me in this hour of darkness, according to Your Word and promise – comfort me, sustain me, and guard me O Lord.”**

When you feel yourself tempted and nearly overcome... entangle Jesus in His words! Hold His words before Him, persistently calling out to Him as the Canaanite woman did. **“Lord, You’ve made Yourself to be my Good Shepherd. Guard me against the temptations before me. Strengthen me against the deceptive voices that tempt me and taunt me. Protect me, dear Lord, my Refuge and Strength, my ever-present Hope in trouble.”**

When you doubt whether such a sinner as you can actually be forgiven by God. When the devil screams in your ear telling you that your sins are *too* bad, *too* scandalous to be forgiven... again, entangle Jesus in His words!

- ✓ Point to your Baptism...
- ✓ Point to Holy Communion...
- ✓ Point to God’s own timeless Word that’s been declared to you over and over.

Grab it, and hold on for your dear life’s sake... of the full forgiveness of all your sins... that Jesus earned for you by His suffering, death, and glorious resurrection from the dead!

And finally, when your last hour comes, and when doubt of your heavenly future rises up in your mind... *by all means*... entangle Jesus in His words! Say to Him: **“I don’t belong to myself, dear Jesus. I don’t belong to sin... or to death... or to the devil. I belong to You! You purchased me with Your precious blood. You called me by name to be Your child in Baptism. Now... I beg of you to fulfill that which You said You would do.”**

A father comes home from a hard day at work. He’s exhausted. He wants only to lean back in his chair and put his feet up for a while. But his beloved child comes up to him and says: **“Daddy, let’s go play catch!”**

The father waves the child off. **“Some other time, son.”**

But the child insists, **“Daddy, you promised!”**

The father thinks for a moment and then nods his head slightly. His son had reminded him of something. On the value of *his* word to his beloved one, the father gets out of his chair, takes up his glove, and fulfills his promise to his child!

Dear Christians, your Father in heaven is by no means weary or self-centered as human fathers can be. How much more then, will He gladly allow Himself to be held to His promises to *you*.

And so, dear children of the heavenly Father, do all that you can to “entangle” God, for that is His good and gracious purpose – to give you His kingdom for the sake of His Son! Thanks be to God! [Amen.]