

We Are Fair Game

Luke 20:1, 2. And it came about on one of the days while he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted him and they spoke, saying to him, "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things, or who is the one who gave you this authority?"

The question ached to be settled. And yet it was not really the question. Yes, these leaders of the Jewish people wanted to know how it was that this man from Nazareth could come to their own streets in Jerusalem and yes, even to the temple, and teach the people. Who gave him such authority anyway? He had not come to them and been so designated. He had not passed certain tests and received certain credentials. He had not made himself accountable to them. But then again, that was not the way prophets showed up on the scene. Prophets in the Old Testament appeared on the scene and spoke with a new voice--usually totally counter to the prevailing message of the time.

On the one hand, all these chief priests, scribes and elders had the upper hand. They had authority and they had numbers. They were people of influence and as we find later had some in with the Roman authorities. They did not have to be afraid of Jesus. But, of course, they were and for good reason. Jesus had people following him, had people believing in his miracles, listening to his words. Something had to be done to thwart this man and stop him in his tracks. They chose the one avenue they knew well. Get him to say something which would reveal his non authenticity. He had to be a fake, right? Showing up the way he did and coming from Nazareth instead of Bethlehem, being an "illegitimate" child. Who does this "guy" think he is? It is just a matter of time and we will expose his game.

Now these men came with an agenda. They knew the result they wanted to produce. They knew the question they would pose would get the outcome they sought. Jesus would have to say something which would either render him harmless--" Actually, I have no authority. I'm just expressing some opinions here." Or Jesus would get himself in trouble by saying how he had authority from God. Then they would have him dead to rights. These people were not simply leaders by virtue of some designation. They were clever and they were cunning.

When we are passive people, silent and sheep like, we are often overlooked and forgotten. Not always. And we'll get to that in a moment. But usually we can stay out of confrontations if we just kind of knuckle under to popular opinion and cause few waves. Leaders will walk right by us and simply say, "Hi, how are you?"

But then, of course, there are treacherous people who see we actually do have something to offer. We might have money, property, influence, a comely member of our family, sex appeal. In this case our passivity which worked so well in not being noticed becomes a major problem for us. Our passivity shines like a neon light to the predators. We look like a wounded animal to them and they are quick to move in for the kill. They will find a way to approach us, to get in dialogue with us and to take advantage of us. Are we vulnerable to this? As human beings we are all intrusions in the world. We are here occupying space, eating food, using resources. As such we are fair game.

Jesus, sometimes we are weak-kneed. We don't like people coming around setting us up. We do anything to avoid that. Give us courage to live boldly and be salt and light in your name. Amen.