

Text: Exodus 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Prayer of the Day:

O Lord, your ears are always open to the prayers of your humble servants, who come to you in Jesus’ name. Teach us always to ask according to your will that we may never fail to obtain the blessings you have promised; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

John 6:68

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.

Sermon Text:

Let’s start with an exercise. I know, not a fan myself but bear with me. This one is fill in the blank. Not out loud but just in your head, fill in the rest of the sentence. What I really want is _____. My life would be ten times better if I just had _____. We would truly be set if we could _____. These things are not sinful at least not in and of themselves. Covetousness is, as I usually define it in Catechism class, a two-fold definition. It is a desire or a want (part one) for something that God has made clear we cannot have (part two). The textbook example of that is found in our first lesson with wicked King Ahab. Wanting the vineyard was not expressly evil, at least not a first. He had the means to purchase it and presented a very generous offer to Naboth for it. Sin reared its head when Naboth explained that as a family inheritance, he simply could not part with it. Then our King pouts like a baby and, at his wicked wife's direction, plots to get it anyway. He covets the vineyard and as a result, falls into numerous other sins. False Testimony, Murder, and theft not to mention a shattering of the first three commandments as he does so. That’s what covetousness does. It is the sin that so often serves as catalyst, consuming us with desire until other sins begin to sprout in order to get what we want.

Brothers and sisters, that’s the answer to the question that long plagued me when I contemplated these last two commandments. God already has told us to honor our neighbor’s marriage and possessions. He has already told us to protect our neighbor’s good name, his reputation. God has already told us to hallow not only his Name, His Word, and His divinity but our neighbor’s life as well. So why do we need these two commandments here at the end? It is a reminder, a much-needed reminder of what Jesus announces in our Gospel lesson, *What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’* ²¹ *For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,* ²² *greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.* ²³ *All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’* (Mark 7:20-22).

This is another massive difference between God and the world around us. Our world’s system of justice is based on what we do. I’m not going to get a ticket for speeding because I thought about it. I won’t even get one if I really want to zip around the corner at 100 miles per hour rather than the 25 that’s posted. I will not get ticketed until I have actually done it. Until then, no harm, no foul. But God is entirely different.

The thought, the desire leaves the command broken, and why? Because God wants to stop the sin before it begins. Before it can get a foothold in the heart and mind of the Christian. He wants perfection and holiness. He knows the truth revealed by James, *each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.* ¹⁵ *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* (James 1:14-15)

With this in mind, the Commandments really form a bit of a circle, don't they? No wonder Jesus would summarize the first three commandments as He does. “*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.’* (Luke 10:27)

So how's that going for you? We've now traveled the long and arduous road of the commandments. Each week we noted the same thing. Another broken commandment in the road of my life. Another list of sins to add to the already revolting reality of our existence. And now, God is in our heads! He sees it before anyone else does. He knows it even when we think we have it hidden. And He knows, He knows just how filthy and depraved we really can be.

But what makes it worse, is the fact that God doesn't give us these commands because He wants us shamed until we are overrun with panic, angst, and self-loathing. He gives them to us because He doesn't want us to be slaves to the sinfulness that rages around us. He doesn't want us to fall to the temptation or be plagued by the guilt of what we have done, what we have said, what we have thought. He wants something far better for all of us.

So what is that? So often as we have discussed the commandments if we want to know what God is protecting, we need only ask what the opposite of the sin would be. If God doesn't want us stealing, then He wants us fulfilled by the work we do to earn a living. He wants us overcome with the joy in knowing that we have helped someone else to preserve their way of life, their income, and their property as well. So with Covetousness, we ask what is the opposite of being overcome by desire for one thing after another? The answer is contentment. God would have us live at peace and joy, to be satisfied with the blessings He has poured out upon us.

Don't mistake this for laziness or some listless existence of not caring, however. It's actually far from it. We are content because we know Paul's Secret. He tells the Philippians, *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* ¹³ *I can do everything through him who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:12-13).

We are content because our desires are focused not on what we cannot have but what we have clearly been given. Our Savior Jesus only desire was for us to be with Him in heaven. It wasn't covetousness, it was love. Un earned, undeserved, unfathomable love which drove Him to take on flesh for us, to live each day of His existence focused on perfection, living in perfection, never did Jesus give into to the “if onlys” which so often consume our thoughts. And even though He possessed the power to make his every desire a reality, He endured the cross for a people often too shallow to think past their temporal existence to the glory He had won for them. In the blood of Christ, not only our visible sin but the secret desires of our thoughts and hearts are all cleansed and paid for. Through Him, In Him, heaven is ours.

And that, that's the secret. That's how you and I are freed from covetousness or any other sin. Freed even from Satan and His temptations. Freed to live desirous of all that God has given the ability to do. Live for Him, in thanks to Him for this amazing gift. To pick up not only the last two commandments but all ten with the intent, the desire, to keep them in thanksgiving for the love our God has showered on us. On our own, we could never accomplish it. On our own, even this could be twisted into the covetousness of work-rigtheousness and the delusion of self-grandeur. But in Christ, in Christ it is done, finished, completed, allowing us to serve, to love, to obey, to live in Godly desire for all He has given us.

What I really want is _____. My life would be ten times better is I just had _____. We would truly be set if we could _____. Ah, but then it's already your's. So throw away the covetousness that would pull you from Him and rest in the contentment given by Christ. Amen!