

Text: Exodus 20:15

You shall not steal.

Prayer of the Day:

God of all power and might, you are the giver of all that is good. Help us love you with all our heart, strengthen us in true faith, provide us with all we need, and keep us safe in your care; 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:

Luke 8:15

Alleluia. Happy are they who hear the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience. Alleluia.

Sermon Text: 7th Commandment

“You shall not steal.” I can recall when the kids were much younger, way back in the sleep-deprived stroller days, we had been shopping and had filled the cart as usual and made our purchases. As we got back to the van and emptied everything into it, we turned to collapse the stroller, and there in the bottom was one last item. I can’t even recall what it was but I remember the panic and dread in my heart. We were thieves! We hadn’t paid for this and were now outside the store, outside the law! What would we ever do? This was it, an entire ministry ended by a forgotten item in the bottom of the stroller! I could see the article in the paper, “Dead Beat Pastor Steals from Local Grocery Store.” Sleep-deprived remember. As I finished putting the stroller away and tended to the kids, Kristin hustled back into the store, apologized profusely, and paid. Again, I don’t recall what it was but it wasn’t anything big because Kristin returned with the news that they had looked at her like she was completely crazy for being concerned about such a small item. All was fine. Prison would not be our lot. Looking back, our reaction was comical. My fears were completely unfounded. But what had happened, intentional or not had stepped outside the lines of the law. This too was a sin against this command. Forgiven? Absolutely! But still, sin.

Maybe we all have stories of the unintentional time we crossed the line into thievery ... or not ... hopefully not. But while this commandment is only four little words long. It turns out there is far more here to think about than simply not swiping my neighbor's stuff. In truth, we might even say that God has a whole divine system of economics that ends up running completely counter to what is the normal thinking of the world around us.

Listen again to the explanation of this incredibly short commandment. “*We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income.*” The via negativa, the “we should not” on this one is almost as basic as the Fifth Commandment. “Swiper no Swiping” as Dora chanted when my kids were small. Ah but then finders keepers losers weepers (or the more adult possession is 9/10 of the law) really shouldn’t be a thing either, right? That’s in the “we should not” but it’s really brought out in the via positiva or the “but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income.”

Doesn’t that kinda run counter to the ways of the world? Think about the whole financial planning system or for that matter the whole way that we approach work at least here in America. Why do we work? It may seem super simple but it’s foundational in the entire way that we think about dollars and cents, property or stuff. Do you work because you want money for all the things you want to do? I’m guessing for the vast majority that’s the answer. But that’s not God’s answer.

Vocationally, we have been given talents by our God. That was our first lesson, right? Talents that we then have the double blessing of using not only to make a living (the Bible does say “*the worker is worth their wages* [1 Timothy 5:18].”) but also to be a blessing to our neighbor, our community, our world as we provide goods and services that complement the blessings God has given to others. Peter writes “*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms* (1 Peter 4:10).”

What is more, when God provides us with wealth for having used our talents in service of others, we not only make a living but honestly a pretty good one. You know the drill. Think about a third-world country for more than five seconds and immediately we begin to understand the abundance that God has blessed us with. This blessing too, He would have us use in manifold ways to be a blessing to ourselves and to others. I get to support the work of His church on earth both locally and globally in that little thing we call first-fruit giving or offerings. I get to provide for my family, clothing shoes, food, drink, house, home, etc. I get to provide for the well-being of others in that thing we call taxes as I provide necessities for the poor, protection for me and my neighbor, orderliness in the laws and courts of the land, and so much more. I get to sustain others as they provide goods and services that are a blessing to me. We call those bills. I get to be charitable for the well-being of others. And then in grace beyond grace, God even says I should enjoy some of it after bills and obligations are done He provides me with rest, relaxation, and yes even the niceties of life for my enjoyment. And in these things too God provides me with fulfillment, contentment, yes even a measure of happiness.

Do we always see it that way? Or do we get caught up in the love of money, greed and like the man in the Gospel decide it’s time to hold on with tight fists and pierce ourselves with many griefs as blessings become burdens as we shift back from the economy of grace into the economy of the world around us. It’s far too easy to do, isn’t it? God goes from first to last ... surely He understands. Bills and taxes are a burden too heavy for me to bear and which often provide far less than I believe is fair. Charity well I’m a good person and would love to do that too but hey with all these hands in my pocket maybe I need the handout and instead of content I am consumed with a want for more and so how can I rest or relax or enjoy the good things of life when all I can do is worry about how to keep them? Tiring, no? Satan is exceedingly good at catching us in the traps and snares of the world around us. Sin it would seem clings to every blessing. What hope is there?

Ah, dear friends, *you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich* (2 Corinthians 8:9). As we struggle against our sin, we find ourselves back at the cross! God had it all, had made it all, so it all belongs to Him, and yet for you, for you, He set the full use of all that power and glory aside and was born not as a king though that is what He was no laid in a manger as if born into poverty. He had no house or home to call His own and even when He would seek a moment to rest and pray it was often robbed from Him as the crowds or the disciples came clamoring after Him. Yet He never complained. He never held on to anything with a tight fist other than Word and teaching of His Father in heaven and even then all so that He who could do everything, could give perfection to you. That He might give up His life as the atoning sacrifice for my Greed and my selfishness, for all the times I have been discontent while blessed with so very much. Though I would pierce myself with the many griefs of greed, He was pierced for my transgressions that I might have hope, that I might have a future, that I might know of a rest beyond those purchased by dollars and cents, purchased by His life for me for all eternity. And I would venture to guess that if I could just look through the lens of that cross at the manifold blessings God has given. If I could just peer through the lens of that cross at my bank account and my brother, well it might just change my economic outlook on things. It might just make it all look a little more divine.