

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota  
September 4, 2016

Exodus 20:17  
Romans 7:7-25  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

## **KIDS' MESSAGE**

Kids, when I was your age, I was so jealous of my older brother and sister. They had two wheel bikes and could ride off down our town road to visit friends, go swimming, and go to the store. Meanwhile, there I sat, with my little tricycle in front of our house. I couldn't ride that trike even to the end of our dirt driveway. I so wished I could ride bike like them.

So, one day, I just decided to fix them. When nobody was around to see what I was doing, I let all of the air out of their bike tires. Ha, I fixed them. If I couldn't ride bike, neither could they!

Kids, I was **coveting** my brother and sister's bikes. I was wishing that I had what they had, even though I wasn't old enough to ride a two-wheel bike. And I let my coveting, my wanting their stuff, spoil our relationship. Do you think they were happy with me when they found flat tires on their bikes? Do you think my parents were happy with me when they learned what I had done? Do you think what I did got me onto a two wheel bike any sooner? No. No. No.

I only hurt them, my parents and myself by what I'd done. What should I have done instead? I should have been happy for them to be able to ride two wheel bikes and go on adventures further from home. And I should have waited patiently for my turn to grow a little older and bigger so that I could maybe do the same.

Can I ride a two wheel bike now do you think? Yes. Will I get too old to ride a two-wheel bike some day? Maybe. But for now, I can enjoy what I am able to do and should never envy someone else for what they can do. God tells us not to covet what other people have. God tells us not to try to take other people's stuff. God encourages us to help other people keep their stuff and for us to be thankful for what we already have. Everything we have – family, food, toys, books, swim suits – all gifts from God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

**You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or anything that is your neighbor's.** Today we are combining the **ninth** and **tenth** commandments which speak against coveting those things which belong to our neighbor. You recall Luther's view that there are **two uses for the law**, or in this case, the Ten Commandments. The **first use** is to **preserve life** – to keep us alive in a chaotic world, long enough to hear the Good News about God's great love for all people through Jesus Christ. The **second use** of the law is to **kill us**. The law is meant to show us that we are not good enough to save ourselves, that we cannot be perfect. Paul tells us that the wages of sin are death. We sin. We earn death. We die.

Luther gets this understanding, in part, from today's second lesson from **Romans 7**. Paul here teaches:

1. The **Commandments don't save us**. They actually kill us.
2. We are **slaves to sin**. We can't help ourselves. Paul, the greatest Apostle says, "**I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.**" Do you understand what Paul is saying? Do you ever do things that you know deep down inside are just plain wrong?
3. We **want to do the good, but evil often trumps** our best intentions. I can't keep the Ten Commandments.
4. Finally Paul cries out, "**Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?**"
5. Paul answers his own question. "**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" Our sin problem can only be overcome by God in Christ on a cross, in a grave, in an empty tomb, risen and coming to us in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, in the preaching and hearing of God's Good News of **salvation by grace through faith** in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Free gift from God to ordinary, sinful people like you and me.

So why try to keep the Ten Commandments? If we can't earn our salvation, if we can't make ourselves more acceptable to God, why bother? Again, from Luther, we are motivated to try and keep the commandments because of our:

1. **Fear God** – awesome God is the source of our lives and salvation, is the source of everything that exists. Awesome God.

2. **Love of God** – God loves me enough to die for me, forgive me and welcome me home to God’s embrace again and again and forever.

Luther always starts his response to the commandments with what we shouldn’t do. “**Don’t covet.**” Don’t try to take for yourself something that belongs to someone else. Don’t desire to get your neighbor’s wife, workers or possessions by “scheming, or by pretending to have a right to them. Do not tempt or coax wife or workers away.”

I have long understood coveting. When I was in elementary school, I longed to have a **snowmobile** just like some of my friends had. Dad said that they were “**too expensive of a toy.**” Later, I longed to have a **motorcycle** just like my cousin Jim had. “**Too dangerous and expensive.** All I had was a V-Room engine on my two wheel, one speed, fat tire bike. In high school, I longed to have a **car.** “**You can get a car when you need it to drive to your job.**” As an adult, it was a **nice boat**, a **fish house** or even a **regular house of our own.** Mind you, I did eventually get a fish house. And we do now own a house of our own.

I think that there is a list of things that we **Minnesotans tend to covet** as well.

1. **Twins** win the **World Series.**
2. **Timber Wolves** win the **NBA Title.**
3. **Wild** win the **Stanley Cup.**
4. **Vikings** win the **Super Bowl.** Ole and Sven had been sitting in the fires of hell for a long time. Then one day, hell froze over. Ole turned to Sven and said, “**Hey, the Vikings must have won the Super Bowl!**”
5. And then we all covet the notion that the **Lynx** might win the **WNBA Title.** Oh, yeah, **they’ve done that several times.**

As near as I can figure, longing for these five professional teams to win national titles, we have **about 20% odds of ever being happy.** Give it up people! It’s all too sad and depressing... We need to celebrate and live fully into what we already have. **Go Gobblers!**

Luther says, not only don’t try to take what someone else already has, but even help folks keep what they have. There is a Jewish folk tale called, “**The Two Brothers.**” It goes like this:

There once were two brothers who farmed together. They shared equally in all of the work and split the profits exactly. Each had his own granary. One of the brothers was married and had a large family; the other brother was single.

One day the single brother thought to himself, **“It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. My brother has many mouths to feed, while I have but one. I know what I’ll do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother’s granary.”** So, each night, when it was dark, he carefully carried a sack of grain, placing it in his brother’s barn.

Now the married brother thought to himself, **“It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have many children to care for me in my old age, and my brother has none. I know what I’ll do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother’s granary.”** And he did.

Each morning the two brothers were amazed to discover that though they had removed a sack of grain the night before, they had just as many.

One night the two brothers met each other halfway between their barns, each carrying a sack of grain. Then they understood the mystery. And they embraced, and loved each other deeply.

There is a legend that says God looked down from heaven, saw the two brothers embracing, and said, **“I declare this to be a holy place, for I have witnessed extraordinary love here.”** (From “Stories for Telling,” by William R. White, 1986, Augsburg Publishing House.)

Our story said that God declared the place where two brothers gave themselves away for each other a **“holy place.”** **“Holy”** means **“set apart for God.”** Every time we give ourselves away for the sake of someone else, it becomes a place set apart for God. And God delights in it. That’s going to be happening here this fall as dozens of us give ourselves away as Sunday school teachers, Confirmation small group leaders and one-on-one mentors and a host of other servant tasks which God will use to give **life, newness and hope** to our **hurting and needy world.**

I never did get the snowmobile, motorcycle or fancy boat. I got the fish house and it ended in disaster. But, I did get some very **hard working, loving parents**. And I did get a **wonderful wife and children**. But some people don't get those either. So I am also thankful for God just plain giving me **life**, letting me be **alive in God's world**. And I am thankful for God **creating me** with **my own set of passions, talents and joys**. And I get a **new start** in this world every day. And I am even more thankful for God giving me **faith so that I know that I'm not alone in this world**. And bigger yet, I am thankful for **God loving and having faith in me** even when I don't have faith in God or in myself.

I've been at many death beds. I am convinced that all that matters to us on our last day is:

1. **Somebody loves us** and **we love them**.
2. **God loves us** and **we love God**.

That's **all** you or I will **ever really need**, even for eternity. Do you have such gifts in your life? So do I. So maybe, with God's help, **we can help the neighbor keep what they have too**. And that will be a **.** Thanks be to God. Amen.