**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Take Care”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

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*Luke 12:13-21*

We don’t talk much about coveting. Typically, we talk much more about the result of coveting. We talk much more about finally giving in and acting on our coveting. Really, I think that the Ninth and Tenth Commandments are some of the hardest to keep. There is almost no outward sign that you are doing it.

Most of the other Commandments have some sort of a temporal consequence; you steal, you go to jail, you kill, you go to jail, you lie and someone finds out, you commit adultery and there are a whole host of consequences. Not so with the Ninth and tenth. You covet your boss’s job, car, or his home, and no one will know until you start talking about it. You covet your friend’s wife, paycheck, or his happy family, and no one will know. You covet your neighbor’s car, position, or friends, and no one will know.

*No one will know*. You all know the problem, of course. There is One who knows our thoughts. There is One who knows our hearts. God knows.

In our text for today, a man asks Jesus to do something for him. Or rather, notice that he tells Jesus to do something for him. He tells Jesus to tell his brother to share his inheritance. The man’s brother has received an inheritance, presumably from their father. It seems that the man’s brother got most, if not all, of the father’s money. The man speaking to Jesus feels that this is not right, and so he asks Jesus, as a rabbi, to mediate the dispute and convince his brother to share.

The man wasn’t happy; he believed that he deserved more inheritance. If we are being honest, it’s hard to blame him! For it all to go to the older brother just doesn’t seem fair. This idea of fairness is the source of so much of our trouble in this world. It is a justification that we give ourselves for our covetousness. I work harder than that person, but they get the promotion or the raise. I spend all my time helping people, but that person helps once, and everyone gives them the attention. I did all the work, but that person got the glory and the credit.

It's all the same; it’s wanting what someone else has. It’s wanting more and more and more; it’s coveting. As I said before, there are not a lot of outside consequences for coveting, but the internal consequences can be just as devastating as adultery or theft. Of course, coveting can lead to breaking other Commandments, but it is also possible for a person to be consumed with coveting.

You spend your whole life trying to get the next best thing. You spend your whole life focused on getting more and more and more. Soon enough, all you think about is yourself and what you don’t have. The only time someone else comes into mind is when they have something that you don’t.

We see the climax of a life of covetousness in the parable that Jesus tells. The man was successful; his farm had a great year, he had achieved the end goal of his desire for more, and he decides to retire early and live the easy life without a care in the world, without a care *for* the world around him. I’m reminded of the Hobbit, written by J.R.R Tolkien, in which there is a dragon named Smaug who raids castles and kingdoms until he has gathered a massive amount of gold and other precious things. Once he has gathered it all up, he sits and sleeps on it, pleased with himself and everything that he has accomplished.

Jesus paints a picture of a man who has done the impossible; he has made it into the good life. The man in the story is a man that many of us would be happy to be. The man in the story is someone that the people of Jesus’ time could have barely even imagined. Their lives were difficult and filled with work. There was no retirement; you worked until your body gave out and then you prayed that you had children who would take care of you.

Now let’s be clear here; Jesus doesn’t say anywhere that having money or being wealthy is sinful. After all, all our money and our possessions are gifts from God, and we learned last week that our heavenly Father gives us only good things. The man was blessed by God; God gave him a good crop and made him wealthy. Wealthy people played a key role in the early church; the first sanctuaries were just the homes of wealthy people.

No, our problem is how we *respond* to wealth. Too often, we are like dragons sitting on and hoarding our gold, just like the man in our story. Too often, we think that God has blessed us just to bless us. Or worse, we think that God has given us wealth because He likes us more or is rewarding us for our faithfulness.

God gives us wealth so that we can give to others. He blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others, to those who need it. God blesses us so that we can show mercy to others. The man’s problem wasn’t his wealth; it was his lack of care for his neighbor. It’s our problem as well, whether we are rich or poor. We can get so focused on money that we forget about our neighbor.

Coveting focuses us in on ourselves even though we all know that we should focus on others instead. Luther’s explanation to the Ninth and Tenth Commandments do just that; they turn us outwards and encourage us to help our neighbor improve and protect what God has given him. Our goal in life should not be to get more. Our goal must instead be to give more and more, to give more and more not only to Christ’s church, but to our neighbor in need as well.

It's a hard thing to do and we fail all the time at it, but we have a Savior who does not. We have a Savior who coveted nothing; He had it all and gave it all away. All power and honor and glory were His, but He gave them up to die a shameful death on the cross. He who is Lord of all became servant of all. He who knew no sin became sin for you so that you might have eternal life.

You have been given a gift greater than any gold or wealth; you have been given faith, life, and salvation, gifts that no money could ever buy. Your soul is at peace; it rests with Christ this very day. You need not fear death or poverty. Your heavenly Father has secured your future by the blood of His Son.

We live in a world of people who are monetarily wealthy but spiritually poor. We have been given faith; we have been given God’s Word. We have beautiful and clear theology. Let us not sit on the gifts God has given us and keep them to ourselves. Let us share them with a world that is desperately in need.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.