

Loving Others: Part II | Exodus 20:1-21 | November 25, 2018
Pastor Nick Shults | St. Mark Lutheran Church | Sunnyvale, CA

In Christ God has provided for all of our needs of body and soul. In this commandment, then, God invites his people to be content with what we have and protect that which belongs to our neighbors.

This morning is the last Sunday in our series on the 10 Commandments before we turn our attention to the season of Advent and our preparations for Christmas. And this morning we are going to focus on the 9th and 10th commandments, both having to do with coveting.

I was talking with Steve Roma, the pastor over at Resurrection Lutheran in Santa Clara, a couple months ago and I was talking to him about my plans to do this series on the 10 Commandments. So I told him we were going to do one week as an introduction, one week on the first table of the law (God) and one week on the second table of the law (neighbors) and then one week just on coveting. So he asked me, "is that an issue in your congregation" to which I responded, "isn't it an issue everywhere?"

It was a happy accident that our conversation around coveting comes today, the weekend after Thanksgiving, or more precisely, the weekend after Black Friday. Our consumerism is on full display in this month between Thanksgiving and Christmas and so it perhaps highlights this notion of coveting and puts it in context for us. For coveting isn't like the other commandments of the law which guard against particular actions such as killing, giving false testimony or stealing. God's command to us against coveting is a command against a particular state of our heart. That is, a state of our heart that is simply not content with what we have.

Thus God commands his people against coveting our neighbors' house, spouse, possessions, etc. His command is against peering over our fence and seeing what our neighbor has and saying, wow, I'd really like *that*. Or, Wow...I'd really like to *be* like that. So this command against coveting reflects God's desire is for our hearts to be content with what He has given to *us*.

Two biblical examples come to mind when thinking about coveting...what it is and what it looks like.

First, King David. He was hanging out on the roof, his eyes fell upon Uriah's wife Bathsheba, and boom! He wanted her. So he took her. As the king, he was already married and had plenty of access to women in the palace. But he wanted Bathsheba, too. So he took her. And then, when she turned up pregnant, he arranged for Uriah -- and the entire military company he was leading into war! -- to be abandoned in the midst of the battle. They all were killed. And it all started with a little coveting (See 2 Samuel 11-12).

Second, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. This royal pair liked to garden. Or, at least, they liked to have a garden that their servants could work for them. Right near their

palace, a faithful fellow named Naboth owned a vineyard. The king offered to buy the vineyard or swap the land for a better stretch of land. Naboth refused. So Jezebel arranged for false charges brought against Naboth and brought in two paid liars to testify falsely against Naboth. In the end, Ahab and Jezebel got what they wanted. Naboth dead and the vineyard a royal property. And it all started with a little coveting (See 1 Kings 21).

In both instances someone in power comes in and takes what is not there. But that's not the only way coveting manifests itself. Coveting manifests itself, primarily, in how we compare ourselves to others. Or in how we compare ourselves against what seems to be the ideal man or woman. Social media seems to exacerbate these problems for us.

Jen and I were having a conversation about this this week. For her, there seems to be an expectation that a woman has it all together. She is successful in her career, is supportive of her husband, takes her kids to piano lessons and soccer practice, keeps a perfect home, is crafty and makes thoughtful gifts in beautiful packages for people. And when we see the filtered perfection of people's lives on facebook or instagram, it's nearly impossible *not* to covet what they have with their perfect vacations and families and Christmas decorations.

And this is a big problem and not just because we spend too much time looking at what other people are doing rather than living our own lives. No, it's a big problem because when you realize that you don't measure up to these unattainable expectations, you start to believe that your inherent worth is less than others.

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The question, then, for us is, Where is God in all of this? We can't just say 'don't covet'. Remember Paul in Romans says that he wouldn't know what it was to covet except the law said, "do not covet". So, as with all the commandments, as sinful people, it doesn't really help to say "stop coveting!".

So Christ comes to us and he brings us his grace and forgiveness and in at least three ways, Jesus redirects our attention from peering over the fence as it were to helping us to focus our eyes on Him.

First, Jesus directs our attention back towards creation, specifically *our* creation by God in *his* image. Created in the image of God, we are reminded once again that we have been created by God and, as his good creation, created with worth and purpose.

That is, being made in the image of God is *enough*. If we see on social media the seemingly perfect lives of others and covet that...if we see that and want what others have...Jesus comes to us in his Word and reminds us that He created us and *he* loves us despite the fact that we might not believe we have enough or are enough.

Christ in His Word reminds us of creation, but then, of course, of salvation.

Our Thanksgiving message this week reminded us of the fact that in Christ Jesus we have everything that we will ever need in Jesus. Forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation from death. Perhaps behind some of our acts of coveting is a sense of not being enough or having enough or knowing enough in order to be loved and saved by God.

But Christ has come to us and tells us that we indeed are loved and have been saved not because we have done anything to earn that but because God has made it so. If anything demonstrates just how much God loves us, it's this great act of salvation on the cross.

Finally, Christ comes and places us in community with one another. Coveting breaks bonds of community...when you lure someone/something away from your neighbor there is obvious relational damage. As can/does the kind of "lifestyle" coveting we've talked about here.

But the church offers grace and reconciliation in Christ. The church offers community that is 'real' and not fake...the church offers a body of Christ where we are reminded of our true identity as one created, loved, and saved by God.

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So as we finish off this series on the 10 Commandments, we remember first that these commandments are for *free people*. First God called us to be his people in Christ and then he gives us these commandments so that we might delight in his will and walk in his ways. And these commandments we're free to do. We're free to love and serve our neighbor because of our identity in Christ.

But as we have seen this morning, the commandments drive us constantly back to Jesus. When we covet - when we look over that fence and desire or long for what our neighbors have - Jesus calls us back to himself. For confession and absolution, certainly. But also for the assurance that we are loved, that we are worth-ful, even if our lives don't look like those lives which we covet.

So Jesus comes to us, as he does each and every day, to remind us that contentment is found in Him and Him alone. It's found in the knowledge that we're made in the image of God. So the image of humans, presented to us through all sorts of media, doesn't really matter. We find contentment in our salvation for it's the one thing we truly need. Our deep spiritual longing to be reconciled back to God has been fulfilled in Christ. And then, of course, Jesus calls us always and ever back to our community in the Church, the body of Christ. It's this community in which we seek reconciliation when the bonds of relationship have been broken because of our sin.

Because of God's grace, because of his gifts of Creation, Salvation, and the Church, we can truly be content in him. Amen.