



March 8, 2017
The Seventh Commandment

Read Matthew 6:25-34

Now we move from “people” to “stuff.” But we haven’t changed our focus. “You shall not steal,” the commandment states. It begins the same as the others, “We are to fear and love God...” It’s time to remember that every sin is a sin against the First Commandment. The root of every sin is idolatry—our compulsion to fear, love and trust anything other than God. We think that we own our stuff. The problem is that our stuff wants to own us.

Stealing means that we refuse to rely on God for what we need. We take matters into our own hands. We are driven by the anxiety of *having* enough. As long as we are ruled by that anxiety, we can never really have enough. The personal security industry is one of the fastest growing business in our country. It’s expensive to worry about our stuff.

Underneath that anxiety is our terror of not *being* enough. No home security system can protect us from that fear. That’s where the devil really has us. It is those whispers about our inadequacy, our insufficiency, our inability, our impotence in the face of mortality—those whispers drive us to steal from our neighbors.

Today we read Jesus’ words on how to deal with our stuff. “*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” That is the key to a life liberated from worry. When you worry, grab yourself by the nose for a moment. Take several deep breaths. And then remember, “*If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?*”

Luther reminds us in his Large Catechism that stealing is more than snagging a few grapes as you pass the fruit in the grocery store. Luther was deeply concerned about what we would call “white collar crime,” all the ways that we defraud one another on the edges of the law in the name of profit. “Let every one know, then, that it is his duty, at the risk of God’s displeasure,” Luther writes, “not to harm his neighbor, take advantage of him or defraud him by any faithless or underhanded business transaction.” For Christians the rule is not “Let the buyer beware.” The rule rather is, “Let the Christian exercise care.”

There is, of course, a positive side to this commandment. Our call is to improve and protect our neighbor’s property and means of making a living. This extends most clearly to the poor and needy among us. Luther writes of those “who turn the free public market into a carrion-pit and a robber’s den. Daily the poor are defrauded.” In the face of such economic abuse, Luther writes that “we are commanded to promote and further our neighbor’s interests, and when he suffers want we are to help, share, and lend to both friend and foe.”

We trust that God will provide for us to have enough. We rejoice that in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit we know that we can be enough. Our vocation in loving our neighbors is to make sure that we share enough.

Let’s pray. Dear God, thank you for providing all that we need for our life in this world. Send your Holy Spirit to give us the love and trust that frees us from anxiety and fear and empowers us to protect our neighbor’s property and build up our neighbor’s means of making a living. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: The narthex and fellowship hall at Emanuel Lutheran Church are awash in boxes to receive your gifts for those in need. A number of members volunteer at the Our Savior’s Food Pantry the second Friday of each month. Perhaps you’d like to try that. Other pantries and thrift stores need contributions and volunteers. And you can advocate with our elected officials for just and adequate food and poverty programs in our state and nation.

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