

## “Covet”

### Exodus 20: 17 (Common English Version)

<sup>17</sup> Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

This week our focus is the Tenth Commandment. This is the only commandment which is repeated. This is a clue for us to pay attention, because although this commandment comes last, that does not mean that it is any less important. In fact, this tenth commandment sums up all the other commandments. It describes what happens when we set our eyes upon something which belongs to another. It describes what happens when we completely forget our call to love God with all our heart, mind, strength and spirit and loving our neighbor as ourselves. It describes what happens when we lose our focus as the people of God and simply see each other as objects to be used or abused.

Before I go much farther in this sermon, I want to take a few moments and talk about this word “covet”. It sounds like such an old-fashioned word, that we may wonder if it has any relevance for us as modern day people of faith. Think of coveting as desiring something so much that it distracts us from our journey of transformation, distracts us from becoming the person God created us and calls us

to be. Think of coveting as wanting something so much that we would do anything to have it, even steal, lie or break the bonds of community.

This last part is key to our understanding the tenth commandment. We know that desiring stuff is human. There is a whole industry built around this need for stuff in our lives. And no one can deny that all of us at one point or another have looked around, have seen other people with better stuff, and thought to ourselves, "I wish I had that." Please hear me say this is typical human behavior. In and of itself, this behavior is not bad. However, when we desire something so much that we act upon that desire, that we take it away even if it belongs to someone else, that's when there is a problem. That's what this commandment is referring to in regards to our behavior. That impulse, to act upon that desire for something that we want so much that we destroy our connection as a community. Or as someone else explained it... "We get the gimmes, that We take an object but it doesn't satisfy the want, so we take another object, and so on, and so on, not caring who we hurt in the process. The only thing we care about is our wants."

That is coveting....the desire and the acting upon that desire no matter the consequences.

For us as people of faith, there are two well-known examples of coveting within our Bible. Yes, there are more but if we talked about all the examples of

coveting which fill our sacred text, there wouldn't be time much of anything else this morning.

So we are only going to focus on the two most well-known examples:

“First, King David. We are told in 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12, that 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.

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. We are told in 1 Kings 21, that 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)"

You see, how our faith story shows us that coveting can start out innocently enough. People saw something they wanted. But everything changed when they acted about that want. That acting upon that want is what lead them to trouble. It is what lead to broken relationships, broken trust, and broken community. Acting upon that want is what turned people into objects which could be used and abused. Acting upon that want is changes the narrative to scarcity and says that there is not enough to go around so I have to get mine first.

As people of faith, when we covet something, we lose sight of who we are. We lose sight of whose we are. We lose sight of our call to act in ways which reflect the character of God. And when this happens, our whole identity changes. No longer are we people who reflect the values of the Kingdom of God, now we are people who reflect the values of greed, consumption, and jealousy, values which reflect the narrative of this world which constantly tells us to only look out for ourselves.

Like all the other commandments, this commandment is an invitation to reframe our narrative as people of faith. So many times we get caught up in the gimmies, in the I want a bigger house, a bigger car, a bigger, well you can fill in the blank, we get so caught up in this idea that we are less than because we don't have the best stuff that ...we miss or take for granted the things we do have in our

lives. We miss or take for granted the people we have in our lives. We miss or take for granted the opportunities we do have in our lives. When we buy into the narrative that there is not enough, we miss the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is all around us, offering us hope, offering us grace, offering us love if we would only open our eyes to see it, to experience it, to open our hearts to the abundance which fills God's creation.

As I have spent time with this last commandment this past week, I have come to see this "Do not covet" commandment as the universe's big pause button. That whenever these thoughts of "I'm not enough, or I don't have enough, or even Why do they have that and I don't," that whenever these thoughts begin to fill our heads, to take over our focus, that this do not covet commandment invites us to pause, to breath deeply, to open our eyes to the true grace which does fill our lives, to see that our God has truly supplied all our needs, that these thoughts of scarcity are not real.

The truth of the matter is that we live in a world which constantly tells us we are not enough, that we need to buy more to be satisfied, that we need to wear ourselves out emotionally, physically, mentally, just to get ahead, but as people of faith, we know there is a different way to be... a way which invites us find peace in the arms of our Savior, a way which invites us tell a different story, a way which

constantly shows us that there is more than enough because we serve a God of abundance. Our faith story, our call as the people of God, our whole identity tells us that we are named and claimed by a God who loves us more than we will ever know and that there is more than enough to go around.

This invitation to not covet is a way for us as people of faith to reframe our narrative from scarcity to generosity because we know, we know there is no limit to God's love and grace. We know that Kingdom of Heaven is not a zero sum game. Rather it is vision of hope, a vision of peace, a vision justice which guides our actions and words as we work to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people. It is a vision of abundance where all of God's children are cared for, and all needs are met.

I fully admit that this would be an excellent time for me to give an example of how not to covet but the sad truth is I can give us more examples of the coveting that is happening in our midst than I can give examples of us not coveting in our culture. So I will simply leave us with this...an invitation to be aware...to be aware of the language we use when we talk about objects or people, to be aware when the gimmies begin to take over and we lose our focus, I will simply leave us with this...an invitation to begin changing our narrative, moving away from the zero sum mentality which drives our world to embracing a vision of what could

really happen in our communities when we realize that there is more than enough resources to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people, that there is more than enough to share with others, that there is more than enough to make God's kingdom here in Earth a reality. May it be so. Amen.