

Stop Thief!

July 30, 2017

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Tyson Labuhn

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The 7th Commandment is what we're taking a look at today as part of our sermon series on Luther's Small Catechism. On its surface, this commandment is fairly straight forward – You shall not steal. But because stealing can mean many different things to many different people, Luther goes on to say that we should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions or get them in any dishonest way, but help him improve and protect his possessions and income.

Stealing is so prevalent in our society today that the “like a Good Neighbor” insurance company ran a commercial telling us that for every person who might acquire something honestly, they know that there's someone who will set out to steal it.

Yet in his writings on this commandment, Luther didn't think that this commandment only pertained to “sneak” thieves, but said that in his time stealing was so common that even “styled great noblemen” and “honorable, pious Christians” showed they had little regard for this commandment. This also seems to be the case in our society. Federal regulators have exposed corporate

fraudulent investment and accounting practices. Much of this kind of fraud has taken advantage of the investors.

But employers and employees also steal and take advantage of one another from time to time. Employers are taking advantage of their employees. In 2012, the Department of Labor required a large retail organization to pay 4.8 million in back wages for illegally denying their employees overtime. And employees aren't just taking advantage of their employers through laziness or sloppy work or by taking office supplies home, taking extra breaks during the day, or doing their personal online shopping at work either. In the news last year, Federal regulators revealed that bank employees were creating accounts in customers' names that the customers themselves were unaware of, so that they might receive extra pay for "achieving" their sales goals.

While all of this might be enough, stealing also includes patent infringement, plagiarism, and identity theft – most notably the computer breach and theft of 21.5 million records stolen from the Office of Personnel Management in 2015. And although you may have never participated in any of this kind of theft, God tells us that when we don't help our neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income we are still guilty of breaking this command. So what have you done??

This past June, police were called by a convenience store clerk in Woodbridge who said that a man has stolen \$40 worth of food and drinks. While the man didn't have identification with him, he gave his name as Rodney Darnell Whitehead, Jr. and provided a social security number which matched the name. A court date was set. The man didn't show up for court earlier this month, so a bench warrant was issued for the man who said that his name was Rodney Darnell Whitehead, Jr. While Rodney Darnell Whitehead,

Jr's nickname is "Lucky", the wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys didn't feel so lucky when the team decided to drop him from their roster. While Lucky let the team management know that he wasn't in Virginia at the time and the police later stated that it was a case of mistaken identity, it didn't matter. Fortunately for him, this week he was hired by the New York Jets. If only you and I could be so fortunate in our time of need...

But there IS Good News for us. Even though we have failed to keep this commandment not to steal and haven't always helped our neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income, God still loves us so much that He sent His Son. Jesus became the chief identity thief for us by taking our sins upon Himself at the cross. He who knew no sin, became sin for us. He took our punishment for all our sins. He suffered and died there so that we might have His forgiveness and be given new identity in Him.

Being given this new identify in Him, we are no longer thieves who steal from others in order to get ahead. Rather we fulfill the 7th commandment through Christ-like self-sacrifice, by giving of ourselves - our time, talents, and treasures – so that our neighbors might be helped. Our witness to the world around us goes from "have to have it" to "have to give it" because our new identities are in Christ who sacrificially gave Himself for us.

This new identity is seen through our church when we give to the benevolence fund, when we donate our time on various social ministry projects, when we go on mission trips, and most recently, when we host Vacation Bible School, so that children might form new identities through the Gospel message. This is radically different from how the world operates around us, yet as we do these things, we store up treasures in heaven where thieves simply cannot break in and steal. The world around us becomes a better

place. As we fulfill this Commandment, becoming truly Christ-like Good Neighbors to those in need, others see Christ in us so that they too might experience the love, kindness, and generosity of Christ, and become Good Neighbors themselves.

And now, may that peace which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in that same Christ Jesus, until He comes again to take us all home with Him forever.

In Jesus Name, Amen.