

Text: Matthew 27:35. Mid Week Lent.

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus, who kept all God's commandments perfectly in our place. Amen.

The seventh commandment. You shall not steal. That's easy. Never robbed a bank. Never shoplifted. Ok. Maybe once upon a time you learned, "What does this mean?" We should fear and love God. Not so easy. That we do not take our neighbor's money or goods, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income. Uh oh. That's not so easy. Ever pushed a little snow into the neighbor's yard. It won't hurt his lawn. Kept him up at night so he couldn't work well the next day?

What about the attitude toward money that lurks deep in the heart? It's often a fine line between financial planning, which is just good, wise stewardship and hoarding money for myself, which crosses the line from stewardship to sinfulness. The Bible clearly calls greed what it is: idolatry! We don't have to look to the very deepest recesses of our hearts to find a greedy thought, an overprioritization on work, the little green money idol alive in each one of us.

But look at the soldiers from this verse! They were gambling. You can sure imagine each of them was wanting to win the lot and get the clothing for himself. Well, let's not be too harsh on them. It was their right to divide up the possessions of those being crucified. It was part of their pay to get something for their labor. The Bible scholar might even point out that they were fulfilling prophecy. In Psalm 22, God made a prediction that people would cast lots for Jesus' clothing. And isn't a lot a fair way to decide? It's completely random!

How quickly, how easily, we see ourselves defending the soldiers, because, really we want to defend ourselves. It's my right to get overtime over him. I've been here longer! It's just part of my pay. But is it always, really and truly honest? It's just my job and I have to work. I have to work. I have to work, right? As though work and money are the most important things in life, more important than family, even more important than God. But isn't work part of God's will? My dad's favorite verse of the Bible, especially on Saturday mornings, was, "if a man will not work, he shall not eat!" Come on! But what's the attitude? What's the top priority? If you were offered a job where you had to work every Thursday night and every Sunday morning what would you do? Really, what would you do? I know it's painful to ask these questions. I know it's not pleasant what we find in our hearts, at least if we are honest and take a real, sincere look. We find a guy who loves money. We find a greedy gal. We find a hell bent sinner.

So Jesus came and kept the seventh commandment in our place. Through the obedience of the one man, Jesus, the many, you and me, are declared righteous! In one of the great understatement of the Bible, God says, "Jesus, though he was rich (owned everything in all the world), yet for your sakes he became poor (lived homeless, had no place to lay his head) so that you through his poverty might become rich (have all the riches of perfection, forgiveness, eternal life.) Jesus became poor not just as your example. Jesus kept this commandment as your Substitute. Jesus kept this commandment in your place. God made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Jesus we have the righteousness, the holiness, the perfection of God. Yes! Perfection, because Jesus kept this commandment and every other, in your place. Yes, holiness, because Jesus' holiness is all God looks at when he sees you, his baptized child. Yes, righteousness, given and shed for you and placed on your mouth to leave you no doubts. Jesus suffered for me! Jesus died for me! Jesus' death means something because Jesus was perfect for

me! His perfect life was the perfect sacrifice. His perfect life is now my own. I am perfect, holy, righteous.

That perfect, holy, righteous status gives us perfect, holy, righteous attitudes, especially toward money. We can be free from the love of money. We can be free from the attitude where I have to work and money is the most important thing. I'm living like Jesus. Money is not my master. Money is my servant. Let me repeat that. Money is not my master. Money is my servant. Money is not the boss of me. I am the boss of the money God gives me. When I see an opportunity to do God's work, I say, "Mr. Money, do God's work for me. I can use you to start a new church, help out Good News, call another pastor to reach more people." Money, you aren't using me. I'm using you.

Maybe it's an opportunity in your family. You want to have your children attend a Lutheran school. You want to give your uncle an unexpected birthday present. That's where financial planning can be good stewardship. You say, "Mr. Money, take care of that. Thanks for serving me. And thank you God, for giving me the money to do that." Maybe your neighbor is out of work. He's too proud to ask, but you can find ways to make Mr. Money serve you and serve your neighbor.

We didn't even talk about taxes. I know, no one likes filling out the form, unless you're an accountant. No one likes writing that check. But the Christian can say, "Mr. Money, take care of that. Mr. Money, I'm happy God lets me spend some of you to support his representatives in the government." Even Jesus paid taxes and did so gladly. I know that's a strange attitude, to gladly pay taxes. I know no one says that. But as Christians, we are living like no one else. We are living like Jesus.

We know and believe that Jesus went through hell for me. We know that he endured all this suffering and death so I am no longer a sinner, but a holy person, a perfect person in God's eyes, a righteous person, for whom all is right between me and God. I have Jesus' perfection on my account with God. That's better than all the money in any account. I'm free from the love of money. I have Jesus. Amen.