

Slaying Greed, Training for Generosity

Mark 10:17-22

Lent II Midweek

March 4, 2026

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week we began our midweek meditation on Slaying the Old Man and training the New by focusing on the 8th commandment – slaying *envy*, and raising up its opposing fruit of the Spirit, *kindness*.

Tonight, our attention turns to the commandments that surround that 8th commandment – the 7th, 9th, and 10th commandments, as they all have a common theme and, if you will, a common enemy: Old Adam’s propensity for greed.

The seventh commandment – “You shall not steal” – is perhaps the most blatant form of greed, a brazen and bald-faced callousness of Old Adam to simply take what he knows does not belong to him. But, the 9th-10th commandments – the former on coveting our neighbor’s *homestead*, the latter on coveting all people and animals who help him *upkeep* his homestead – those commandments on coveting remind us how truly greed is a matter of the heart and, thus, of the *idolatry* condemned by the first commandment... so that, in our text, Jesus exposes not only the rich young man’s greed, but his idolatry.

Indeed, as the bookends of the 10 commandments teach us that sin begins *in the heart*, you must recognize for proper wrestling

against Old Adam that the 7th commandment on stealing is even more a commandment about greed of the heart than it is about thievery of the hands. Notice how Luther implies such in his explanation of the Seventh Commandment: “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...”

Old Adam’s love of Self will justify many levels of dishonesty. We’ll say that our neighbor “didn’t mind,” or “he didn’t need it anyway”, that “he should be okay with it because God has so generously provided for him that it really won’t *hurt* him that I claim his things for my daily bread.” Our greed especially justifies this against those we deem wealthier than us, and such justification even takes the form of proposed social policy about the rich paying their fair share. No, that’s not just politics – it’s greed. No wonder Jesus cites the commandment in our text as “You shall not defraud.”

To be sure, the Scriptures highlight the idolatrous greed of the **rich** ... the rich young man, who loved his treasures more than Christ. And we certainly love to *label* as greedy anyone richer than us. Yet, the Scriptures also pinpoint the truth that the poor are often *more* greedy than the rich whom they accuse as being greedy when, in truth, God knows that the rich in some way *need* that type of provision more than the less wealthy. Ever thought of that? People aren’t simply rich because God’s daily-bread provision “got out of hand” and God “lost control” ... He divinely knows why the rich *need*

that wealth [as Luther catechizes us, “God richly and daily provides all I *need* to support this body and life]. That doesn’t mean ‘extras’ that you don’t *believe* you need came from *you*; it means maybe you need it in ways you didn’t *know* you needed it... for example, needed to learn how to faithfully handle it! And thus those *less* wealthy are harming the rich when they attempt to siphon away what God has intentionally given them or allowed them to have that He might test and strengthen them not to idolize their wealth).

Another level of dishonesty is this: how commonly Old Adam will justify his greed as simply a faithful effort to provide for his family... forgetting, of course, that God has promised to provide daily bread and taught us to depend upon Him and not our own heart’s confidence. Yes, that mindset of “I’m not greedy; I just want to provide for my family,” how truly has that led to a cut-throat society, voting for any policy that will benefit my own family even if unfair to others... and all it does is teach the heart to be greedy and raise a generation whose hearts are secure in their sense of entitlement.

Notice, in all we’ve so far said and meditated on, greed always begins in the heart and mind and, as such, really begins as an issue between God and me – a sin against God and harm of myself. Indeed, there’s perhaps few things Jesus speaks of more than the love of material comfort, the love of mammon, greed and covetousness. Again, not only a sin against God, but by it Old Adam also *attacks and harms* New Adam’s confidence in God.

So, in truth, we haven't even yet really talked about the one we're *supposed* to be focused on – our neighbor! So much of the key to wrestling against sin and slaying the Old Man is to recognize Old Man's true motives are always fixated on the Self: "What's in it for me?" And, if loving the *self*, then (comparatively speaking) hating the *neighbor*. Indeed, greed is the *antithesis* of love of neighbor, isn't it?

But, if we are to slay and drown Old Man, New Man must first be confident in God's promises, before New Man can look in love at his neighbor. Thus, as Jesus teaches on the love of material comfort, He doesn't just say "greed is bad;" rather, he points out it is unnecessary and a complete waste of effort! What can you add to your life by being anxious? What good is it to fix your attention and goals and daily life on amassing a storehouse of wealth when your life can be required of you in the blink of an eye? And, more *positively* speaking, if God promises the lilies of the field and the little birds of the air that He will not leave them cold or hungry, will He not care for you who are his adopted children? In Christ, isn't the entire kingdom of heaven and all its riches *yours* – now! – in the measure that God knows you benefit from it? Just as children of the house need to be regulated on their use of the fridge and pantry (and yet it is still all purchased for *their* benefit), so also God regulates our use of the full inheritance of heaven by giving us what is beneficial "in due season" and withholding what would be gluttonous and injurious, even though the bread is in and of itself good.

So then, the Lord protects us from ourselves, from Old Adam greed, and he teaches us to trust *Him* for our provision and thus, to slay Old Adam's love of self... and He teaches us this by exercising us to 'look outward,' if you will. And as we do so, we wrestle against Old Adam greed, with the fruit of the spirit that is *generosity*.

Now, generosity may not seem like much of a fruit of the spirit. In fact, on first glance, you don't even find it in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. But, "generosity" is another way you might say "goodness." Good-ness seeks what is good for someone else, seeks to share God's good things with them. This makes it different than the world's surface level generosity... for the world can certainly be numerically generous (some of the great philanthropists of our day are *atheists!*)... but, where they can be *numerically* generous, they cannot convey the goodness of God. What does Jesus say in our text? – "No one is good but God alone," so all good-ness is from God.

Recall, kindness (as we considered it last week) differed from the more surface-level politeness by the fact that it flows from the heart not merely *toward* a neighbor, but through the lens of Christ and from our loving God. So also, goodness is deeper than mere generosity, for goodness flows from a heart that knows all that is "good" is not only *defined* by God, but truly *comes from* God. ("Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above"). My goodness toward my neighbor can only be defined as my desire to share with him the temporal blessings of God; the moment I see my gift to a

neighbor as personal generosity because of self-*loss*, Old Adam has begun to *cling* to that which is given and actually envy my neighbor for receiving that which New Adam freely gave him. And wherever I worry about self-*loss*, my goodness toward my neighbor has been replaced with a mere *show* of worldly generosity, for it veils Old Adam's insatiable greed.

Thus, to fight Old Adam, New Adam must be trained to recognize he can be freely and truly generous and full of goodness because His God will not let him go without. How does the Psalmist confess with comforted confidence regarding the Lord, his Shepherd: "*Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*" God has promised daily bread; He has promised to keep my life; He has promised to guard my goings and comings from this day forth and forevermore. Thus, greed is a useless waste of anxious, idolatrous energy, and I may use that energy to exercise in turning my attention to others.

And, to train us up in that, God teaches you to first give thank-offerings... not because *He* needs it, but because *you* do. Your New Adam needs to be trained up, your Old Adam needs to be slain, in learning, not just in textbook theory, but in true exercise and practice – must train to depend upon God for all good. And our firstfruit thank-offerings testify to us that Old Adam can let go of his love of Self, and New Adam will still never be without. Therefore, our

offerings actually have the salutary effect of teaching us we rely on God.

But, recall, where our reliance on God is Christian *faith*, Christian *love* is focused on our neighbor, generosity toward our neighbor. Goodness encourages our neighbors that God has not forgotten *them*. Instead, God is so gracious so as to not just provide daily bread by giving each person the *strength* to labor, but sometimes reminds the neighbor His provision comes through the hand of *someone else's* labor, even someone else's God-given *wealth*....and that someone else is me toward my neighbor; that someone else is you toward your neighbor. (And, in receiving that love of neighbor, isn't Old Adam embarrassed by it, ashamed by it, because he wants to be independent? No, you are dependent upon and learning God's goodness toward you!)

And in true love and goodness toward your neighbor, you have ample opportunity to practice generosity. Luther grounds it in the exchange of *stuff, money*, items... the very things greed idolizes. Luther says that when a person loves God, "he does not cling to money; he uses his money cheerfully and freely for the benefit of his neighbor. He knows full well that he will have enough no matter how much he gives away."

But such goodness and generosity is also shown in the giving of time, of energy, of *Self*. Last week, we used the beautiful words of Titus to speak of God's loving-*kindness* pouring out the Spirit upon

us; but how does that verse begin, “But when the *goodness* and lovingkindness of God appeared...” Goodness is not just a sacrificing of stuff, but of *Self*. The Triune God gave the Son; the Triune God pours out the Spirit. The Triune God gives sacramental gifts (true objective *stuff*) that actually gives Himself.

So then, just as God before him, so also New Adam gladly sacrifices Self.

Consider how, just a few weeks ago, we heard in the Old Testament reading from Isaiah that God’s desired fast is not for man to simply starve himself, but to *do good* to his neighbor: “Is this not the fast that I choose, declares the Lord, ... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him...” And isn’t that ‘fulfilled’ through the efforts of the faithful, as Jesus prophesies that he will say on the Last Day, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; a stranger, and you welcomed me in... naked, and you clothed me.” And, when did the faithful do this? “When you did it to the least of my brothers (Christians!), you did it to me.”

Thus, goodness and generosity are practiced among the faithful in the way the world can never practice. The very first place to practice this is within your own household. A husband ought make sure his wife’s needs and comforts are met before his own. Wives ought put their energies into showing goodness to their husbands.

Parents sacrifice the energies and treasures of their marriage for what is good for their children in accord with God's will (because anything *not* according to God's will is, by definition, not *good* for their children!). Siblings ought learn that sharing is not just a tool to curb toddler infighting, but a weapon to slay Old Adam... as brother and sister care for one another and are generous because they live confidently that their father will provide and replace wherever there is undue loss... That's great exercise and practice for New Adam into adulthood, to be emboldened that the Father in heaven will even care for *him* when he is head of his own household or care for *her* when she is *wife* devoted to her husband's wellbeing and mother daily distributing the household's provision for her children.

We perhaps forget that daily life in the home is a *Christian* exercise that is to strengthen New Adam. We too often believe that New Adam is 'on display at church' and we can 'be ourselves' at home. That's Old Adam talking, and it's Old Adam substituting polished exterior-only 'politeness' for true kindness... and with it, guarding his right to be greedy because, he reasons, "I already have to sacrifice for my spouse, children, siblings." And suddenly, we have turned goodness and its generosity into a worldly pity-party of self-*loss*.

Indeed, perhaps the word "sacrifice" is not included as fruit of the Spirit because we would assign the word with Old Adam's perceived self-*loss* rather than with New Adam's *joy for his neighbor*.

We would begin to equate *our* sacrifice with Christ's and begin to think God should notice us and be pleased with our sacrifices.

But Christ sacrificed Himself and rejoiced in our gain. And in that vicarious atonement His blood proclaimed the *goodness* and *generosity* of the Father toward us sinners. Thus, even in our own family, we ought look upon family members not with the bitterness of our lost treasures or energies, but in the joy of their gain.

What is true in the immediate family is true also in the church family. If we are to see rightly, we are to see all things being joyfully done and given so that our church family members may know the goodness and generosity of God. And with *varied* gifts from God in the church family, the apostle says, there is no shortage of opportunity for such joy in God's goodness to *abound* in a congregation's life.

Older members may not have great energies to share goodness with their brothers and sisters in Christ, but may have been blessed by God with great treasures that would only be wasted if left to godless and unfaithful heirs of the flesh, who greedily assume it is theirs by birthright. But, in the new birth of water and the Spirit, what encouragement in God's goodness does it give for the younger generations of the baptized ("the least of these my brothers") to be blessed with the daily bread of God's provision for the congregation through the regular generosity of a wealthier 'sibling in the faith' or by a dear Christian who has died in the faith

and leaves an earthly inheritance because he/she no longer needs earth's daily bread in the bliss of life everlasting and the abundance of our heavenly inheritance.

Likewise, the younger generation of the Church that is so encouraged by the daily bread it is less able to provide the church family may show God's goodness through New Adam's energy to love the family... blessed with young singing voices of angelic purity and strength; gifted with generous zeal able to put down the day's office work or school studies and still have energy to work, not for earthly pay, but to volunteer for the joy of the congregation's benefit; even able to expend strength and energy for the visitation and care of dear older brothers and sisters in Christ physically unable to join the weekly gathering at the family table.

Opportunities for New Adam to be exercised in generosity and goodness abound in our daily lives, both at home and in the household of God. Old Adam knows this, despises it, and seeks every opportunity to reframe daily life as a routine of unfairness, of loss and scarcity, as uncertainty over God's provision and self-pity in measuring against my neighbor. Such greed must drown and die, and New Adam has ample opportunity to exercise and be strengthened not only *against* greed, but also *in* confidence of God's provision, that we may live with faith in Him and fervent love toward one another.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
March 3, 2026