

## **“Greed” by Rev. Cameron D. St.Michael**

Almighty God, bless the hearing and reading of your Word. Let the Holy Spirit descend upon us, that we may understand your Word for us today. As your scriptures are read, as your Word is heard, let the utterances of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sights, O Lord. By your Holy Spirit in your Holy Church and let God’s people say – Amen.

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Book of Acts, chapter 4, verse 32 through chapter 5, verse 11.

The community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say, “This is mine!” about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need.

Joseph, whom the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (that is, “one who encourages”), was a Levite from Cyprus. He owned a field, sold it, brought the money, and placed it in the care and under the authority of the apostles.

However, a man named Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. With his wife’s knowledge, he withheld some of the proceeds from the sale. He brought the rest and placed it in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Peter asked, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has influenced you to lie to the Holy Spirit by withholding some of the proceeds from the sale of your land? Wasn’t that property yours to keep? After you sold it, wasn’t the money yours to do with whatever you wanted? What made you think of such a thing? You haven’t lied to other people but to God!” When Ananias heard these words, he dropped dead. Everyone who heard this conversation was terrified. Some young men stood up, wrapped up his body, carried him out, and buried him.

About three hours later, his wife entered, but she didn’t know what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her, “Tell me, did you and your husband receive this price for the field?”

She responded, “Yes, that’s the amount.”

He replied, “How could you scheme with each other to challenge the Lord’s Spirit? Look! The feet of those who buried your husband are at the door. They will carry you out too.” At that very moment, she dropped dead at his feet. When the young men entered and found her dead,

they carried her out and buried her with her husband. Trepidation and dread seized the whole church and all who heard what had happened.

This is the Word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

This week, we start talking about greed, and in some ways, we are still going to be talking about pride. And that's because, like I said last week, pride is sort of a gateway into all of the other sins. And here we have a great example of pride and greed. All of the people are giving up what they had and were going, "Oh, well you know what? I don't need this, I'm going to sell this, I'm going to give the money to the apostles and they will give it to whoever has a need, and I'm going to just put my trust that this is going to work out fine." And Ananias wasn't sure that he had that much trust. He and his wife decided, "You know, we could sell this, but why don't we just keep some of this for ourselves and we'll just tell them this was everything we got for the sale?" And as is pointed out, he could've just decided "I'm going to keep a part of this and I'm going to give you *most* of it." He could've just kept it for himself. Instead, his pride got in the way. His pride told him, "Well, if I'm going to give, I want them to think that I gave everything I got with this sale. I want them to think I'm doing just as much as everybody else." And maybe if pride got in the way that he thought "maybe I need to keep a little back, because maybe I'll give them all this, but maybe there won't be enough for me if we turn out to be in need, so maybe we'll just hide some of it and we'll keep it just in case we need it." And he gets greedy. He gets greedy he doesn't trust that if they have a problem that they will be helped. They get greedy and decide that they don't want to give all of it away, they want to keep some of it for themselves. And it causes them to lie. They try to deceive others so that they hide what they have, because they don't want to be seen as greedy and they start deceiving other so that they hide what they're trying to accumulate.

Greed is that thing that makes us want more, and it's not wanting more out of need. If you are hungry and you only have a little bit of food to eat, it is not greed that makes you want more food, it's hunger, it's need. But it's greed when we have plenty to eat but we decide that maybe we need to have enough stocked up that we'll be able to eat for the next two months or the next two years. And we will build up store houses and we'll have things for years to come but we'll have to spend money on making sure we've got enough places to store them. Greed is

that thing that causes us to not want to share. It's that thing that pushes us to say, "This is mine, not yours!" And we see greed all over the place. Greed becomes very pervasive and it gets into every little facet of life. Sometimes, we get greedy with our siblings and we decide that 'this is mine, nobody else is going to have it. Not my siblings, because this is mine, they don't deserve it. I've been the best behaved around here. I deserve this!' Sometimes it happens with our neighbors. We have something good we want to hide it away, we want to keep it, because we don't want to show it off, because they will want to borrow it. It's *mine*. And in some ways, envy and greed go hand in hand and that envy is sort of that wanting what others have and greed is wanting others to not have what you have.

And we can be greedy about anything. I have found that if it's possible to be greedy about it, somebody has decided to be greedy. We see it in homes between family members. We see it in communities between friends and neighbors. We see it in the church that standing here next to the communion table, I think about those who want to be greedy and keep this to themselves and would say that certain people aren't welcome, because they want to horde God. They want that experience to be for them and not for anybody else. They want to close things off because they've gotten greedy. We see it with nations. We see it with nations when we decide that this land is no longer your land, but this land is simply *my* land. That this country is *my* country and not *your* country. That the country is for people like me and it's for the people who are here, and we think about it as not the land of the free but the land of *our* free. And not the home of the brave, but the home of *our* brave. And there's not enough room for everybody. We take that idea that this country is ours and ours alone and we don't think about those who see us as a beacon of freedom, as a beacon of hope, as a place to be free, because they have no chance to be free. Because we have decided that we want to be greedy and keep this land all to ourselves. We would turn away those who are escaping violence, those fleeing a place where they no longer have a home in, and decide "sorry, this inn is full, there is no more room."

And we get greedy in our hearts. Sometimes we think that if we give away too much love that there's not going to be any love left for us. That if we give away too much of anything that we're not going to have enough left. If we forgive too much, there's not going to be any

forgiveness left for us. Sometimes we value our things more than people. That we would rather see somebody thrown in jail for stealing a loaf of bread than we would be to simply share it, knowing that they had a need.

And greed can happen without realizing it, because it often starts with something simple and it usually starts off as something not bad. It's okay to want nice things, it's okay to want a better life for you, for others. Nobody wants to spend their life being uncomfortable and struggling, but at some point, we start to step over the line and we go, "Well, now I'm comfortable but I bet I could be more comfortable. I'm comfortable today but, you know, how can I make sure that I'm comfortable in the years to come? And I better make sure I plan so far ahead that I will be comfortable for as long as I can imagine. But gosh, maybe I won't be able to enjoy it so maybe I should spend all of it now on myself and make sure that I am extremely comfortable now that I don't have to worry about anything ever again. And then finally, when I'm done worrying about all of that, then I'll be able to give."

At some point, helping others falls to "someday." Someday, when I'm finally comfortable enough, I will help. Someday, when I have enough for myself, then I will start to give back. Some greed can happen in all sorts of relationships. Sometimes it happens with our time, that we go, "Oh, well you know, I could go see Sue, she isn't feeling well, but gosh, you know, I haven't had time to sit down to read lately, and I've got things around the house to do. Maybe I'll just do some things for myself for a while." And we keep doing things for ourselves and we keep doing things for ourselves and suddenly we decide that all of our time needs to be spent on us because "we're worth it" and suddenly, we start ignoring the people around us. We get greedy because we want more and more and more and want to find room for more and more and more and sooner or later, there's not enough room unless we push something else out. The same thing happens with love. Same thing happens with mercy, with grace. Sometimes we think, "Well, if I keep showing people mercy, they're just going to walk all over me so I need to stop being merciful because I want to be respected, I want to be able to hold on to all these things, I want to be able to hold off all of my things, and I want to go be able to protect this life that I built up. If I'm generous, sooner or later, I won't have anything to be generous with, so I

just need to give a little bit and keep the rest for me so that later, I can be even more generous.”

Later is the word that comes up time and again that leads us to be greedy. When we put off the things that we could do today, and maybe we'll do them tomorrow, because today we just want to hold onto these things. But I'm reminded of how generous Christ is. I'm reminded of what he was willing to give for us, that he was willing to give all, that not even his life was off limits as something that he would give to the people he loved. When was the last time you thought about giving up your life for someone? Thought about giving up your very freedom for someone? That Christ calls us to take up our cross and be willing to give our all for our brothers and sisters. That if we are to love Christ, we must love him generously with our whole heart. That if we are to love him, we must love him with all that we are, all that we have. That we love him so much, we are willing to take the grace that he has given us and give it to everybody that we meet. That we share it generously. That we're merciful, because mercy has been shown to us. That we share what we have, because we know it's simple by the grace of God that we have anything to share at all. That it is by his will alone that we are here to be able to do what we do, that we can store up treasures here on Earth, but what good would those do us? What good will they do us if they cause us to lose sight of the Kingdom? They cause us to lose sight of the sacrifice that was made for us, that we are unwilling to sacrifice for others.

Let us be a people who not only love freedom, but who share freedom. A people who not only love justice, but a people who share justice. A people who not only love mercy but share mercy. A people full of grace, because we have a choice to make. We cannot use up all of God's love. We cannot use up all of God's grace, we cannot use up all of his mercy. So the choice is, will God's grace flow through us to others or will it roll over us to get to others? Will God's love work through us or will God's love work in spite of us? Are we to be greedy with what God has given us or do we let it flow through us? That we may share in all that we have and all that do and share in that goodness, and that grace, and that mercy, and be generous? Generous to the point that all we have left is that God will sustain us. Let us be people who walk with the Lord. People who let his love flow through them and let us be generous with all

Sunday, July 1, 2018

that we do, with all that we see, and all that we are, to serve the Lord who gave his all, that we can give our all. Amen