

THE SIN OF GREED
Fifth in a Sermon Series on the Seven Deadly Sins
Peace in Christ Lutheran Church
Walkersville, Maryland
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“For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.” (Jeremiah 6:13)

This series is winding down. Next Wednesday, we will take on both the sins of gluttony and lust. I would stress yet again that this series, as with others, is designed to be taken as a whole, even if the parts are themselves significant. The sins are a package. They have to do with each other, and, at times, flow into each other. They are no less deadly than a millennium or so ago when they were first framed. I have honored my own boundary of keeping these messages short, but, as usual, have also longed for more time. Given the prophesy of Jeremiah, in which greed has to do with prophets as well as profits, I would especially like to spend a few hours and not just a few minutes with you on the sin of greed. Perhaps we shall re-visit these sins in a Bible study. For the sake of trying to be well-rounded, I am providing you with the corresponding saving virtues.

Speaking about the deadly sin of greed in America is a little like preaching against the Monarchy in England, if we wished to be superficial. The truth is that America neither invented greed nor is the worst practitioner of it. Jeremiah shared just how pervasive greed really has been. We think of greed having primarily to do with money; human beings can be especially greedy in the pursuit of financial gain.

Frederick Buechner, whom I will quote this evening and next Wednesday, in his 1988 award-winning book, *Whistling in the Dark*, wrote regarding money: *“There are people who use up their entire lives making money so that they can enjoy the lives they have entirely used up. Jesus says that’s its easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Maybe the reason is not that the rich are so wicked they’re kept out of the place, but that they’re so out of touch with reality that they can’t see it as a place worth getting into.”*

It has been said that it is the possessing and not the possessions that the greedy are really concerned with. After all, how much playing with what one has can one do if one is still busy acquiring? It is the process and not the product, the pursuit and not the conquest. The love of money and not money is the root of all evil. I do not believe it is about money or what money can buy anyway, again unless we wish to remain superficial. Money may be the easy part of grasping greed.

If one takes a domestic animal, a dog and not a cat; a cow or possibly a bear, ties it up from birth with a ten-foot chain pivoting around a pole and leaves it there for some time, there is a good chance that it will stay within the radius even if let loose. B. F. Skinner, the father of Behavioral Psychology developed years ago what became known as "The Skinner Box" in which a human child could be raised with a totally controlled environment. I do not remember when he suggested the child be let out, but I suspect he or she would not be any fun at a party. He should have developed a box for teenagers.

We are conceived, grow in the womb, are born in a room, and grow steadily for the better part of two decades. All mammals, as they grow, require more space. Infants get into all kinds of things as they explore their world. They quickly must be constrained for their own and their parents' good. They learn the boundaries, but later learn to use the fire they could not previously touch, to cross the street they were to fearfully avoid, ride the bike, drive the car or get into a plane until the whole planet is a candidate for their visitation. **With none of this does one have to own it to visit or appreciate it.** The inquiring mind wants to know; the busy body wants to go, but the greedy must have and control it. We have not been tied to a pivot with a safe if insane radius. Explore! Appreciate! Celebrate! Experience it all! Hold it, just do not have to have it!

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." (Psalm 24:1) Yet God has shared it all with us and demands that we share it with each other. Having money, material, or political power is not sin by any definition, presuming that it was gotten legally and morally, but using any of it to scare and not share is sin. It is not quantity. A little held but not shared is worse than a lot held but shared.

It gets down to our grasp of grace. ***"God so loved the world that He gave. . ."*** (John 3:16) The lover gives, the hater keeps. Christians believe that God has given His best. Because of Jesus, we can faithfully and fruitfully speak of giving and sharing God's resources, while experiencing and enjoying as much of God's creation as time and money will allow. Others we encounter are God's people too, ones for whom Christ also had to die and in whose blood they are cleansed and forgiven. Hold nothing back from them, even the seemingly nastiest of them. Care about all and share with all. The cost otherwise is deadly.

Perhaps we can "eed" together. The only two words in English with double "e"s are greed and weed about which we are warned. Breed, creed, deed, feed, heed, lead (woops, an "a"), need, and seed are all positives. May our "eeding" be good-deeding, fine-feeding, soul-seeding and love-leading to us all. Grace and not greed is our creed!