

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

July 31, 2016
Proper 13C / Ordinary 18C / Pentecost +11

The readings this week:
• Hosea 11:1-11 • Psalm 107:1-9, 43
• Colossians 3:1-11 • Luke 12:13-21

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

to covet or not

Nearly a decade ago I read the late Dr. David Noel Freedman's wonderful, and sadly lost in the shuffle, book, "The Nine Commandments." In the book Dr. Freedman illustrates a pattern that through all his years of scholarly study he discovered in the first ten books of the Bible: a pattern of Israel publicly and systematically breaking each of the first nine commandments, of the Ten Commandments.

The pattern ends with the destruction of Jerusalem along with the murder and subjugation of its inhabitants. The pattern is so compelling, as even small sections of narrative concerning the breaking of these commandments interrupt sections of scripture which aren't narrative in character, like Leviticus and Numbers. In other words non-narrative sections of scripture are broken so that the story of another commandment being broken can be told. Of course, the startling thing is that it's the Nine Commandments, and not the Ten Commandments.

What happened? Where's the Tenth?

Dr. Freedman's analysis on this point is illuminating. The tenth commandment is "thou shalt not covet." It's the only commandment that deals with an interior predisposition. You can't murder someone without there being a body. You can't commit adultery, without another person's involvement. You can't profane the sabbath day without someone noticing. The first nine commandments aren't things that happen just inside the mind or soul of a person – they are actions that happen.

But, coveting is something that only happens within a person. You can't prove that someone has coveted anything. It's unprovable.

Until they act on it.

Dr. Freeman's insight is that coveting is at the heart of every broken commandment. David coveting Bathsheba. The men of Sodom coveting Lot's visitors. Adam and Eve coveting the fruit – and the promise that went with it's ingestion.

Coveting is at the heart of sin. We want. We desire.

And sometimes we want and desire the right things. God. Our spouse. Goodness.

And sometimes we covet that which isn't right. Money. Stuff. Our neighbor's spouse.

The story we have from Luke's Gospel today deals with coveting. A man covets 'stuff' and builds larger and larger barns to hold all the stuff he's acquired.

But, this isn't a simple parable meant to ward us off of greed. It's a story to demonstrate two different interior predispositions. Do we live with a predisposition towards God, or to something else?

That's what this passage is about.

And Jesus' point is the point of the Old Testament (according to Dr. Freedman): living a life predisposed to coveting anything is the road that leads to sin. And it's a well worn path. And it's a path that leads no where good.

Seeking out a 'holy grail' in the scriptures – a Grand Unified Theory of the Bible is a task that has kept many busy. And Dr. Freedman's answer is one such theory and answer. And, if you look at this periscope through his prism, I think it is illuminating. And haunting.

The kind of faith that Jesus intends us to have is the kind that goes beyond going to church for an hour a week, or even doing a good deed from time to time. It's a faith that springs up from within us. It's an interior way of living, being, and interacting with the world and everything in it.

And, if we have this faith that Jesus compels us towards, then we don't need anyone to arbitrate a dispute over our inheritance. We don't build larger and larger barns to hold more and more stuff.

It's the path of the fool, in Jesus' language.

But, to live predisposed to seeking God, is being rich towards God.

~ Rick Morley, [a garden path](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Hosea 11:1-11

When is it hard for you to experience God's love for you as his child? What emotions do you sense as you read 11:1-11? How did the Lord treat Israel? Why does Israel respond to the Lord as she does? What do you make of God's anguish as he wrestles with treating Israel like the sister cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Why will the Israelites finally respond to God's call? How is your experience of God like the Israelites'? What does it mean to you that the Lord is not human? How are you affected by the descriptions of God's emotions? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 107:1-9, 43

How do you personally explain the love/anger relationship between a parent and a child? Can a child anger a parent so much that the parent stops loving them? What are the ways that we learn about our God? Experiences, books, others, etc. What have you learned about the character of our God? Why is the pain of distress such a great teacher and relationship builder? Think about between people, between a person and God. Why is the analogy of wondering in a desert so perfect for describing mankind's search for God today? [Lost Pine.com](#)

Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need, but not everyone's greed.



-Mahatma Gandhi 1869-1948

When I pay attention to the present moment, I feel God lavishing riches upon me. Paying attention, I suppose, is letting myself be rich toward God.

In this moment: the scent of earth still clinging to me after weeding the lavender.
The still, cool air on my skin.
Ginger tea warming my throat.
The robin's clear dawn melody.
First shafts of sunshine pouring through the trees on the east side of house.

Being rich toward God seems to me to be more about consciousness than bustling around the church managing God's business. Noticing the scent of lavender and earth and early morning and still being grateful for it by the end of the day. Noticing the other: taking risks in love for Love disguised as the unlovable.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: Colossians 3:1-11

As a child, how did setting your heart on a certain toy or gift affect how you acted and what you thought about? What do you think Paul means by things above and earthly things? How can we set our hearts and minds on things above rather than on earthly things? What do the things we are to "put to death" have in common? Our old ways of reacting are compared to a garment we took off at conversion. Why is each type of behavior inconsistent with our new life in Christ? Although we may still struggle with these sins, what resources for change do we now have? How can we keep God's perspective on immorality and greed when our culture accepts them as the norm? In verse 11 Paul lists the distressing divisions between people in the Colossian culture. How would becoming aware of Christ in other Christians help us to eliminate our cultural divisions? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: Luke 12:13-21

What was your view of money growing up? From whom or where did you get your perspective? What was Luke's big idea in 12:1-12? What does the man in the crowd want Jesus to do? Why was Jesus not willing to do what the man requested? How would you paraphrase what Jesus says in 12:15 to set up the parable? What is the rich man's philosophy of life? How was the rich man foolish? How does one "lay up treasure for himself"? What does it mean to be, "not rich toward God"? What is the consequence of not being rich toward God? What was your view of money growing up? From whom or where did you get your perspective? Are you tempted to trust money too much? If you were to analyze your present view and use of money, how does it connect to your following Jesus? [Radical](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Give me a heart of flesh to replace this heart of stone. Help me to be present to You this moment in love. And the next moment. Help me to know You in love and in Your Love. Give me a habit of love, so that when that 'very night' comes, I might respond in love and in Love. Amen.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)