

# Stealing: It's Really Not That Bad...





...he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. —John 12:66

Question 140 of the Larger Catechism teaches us the Eighth Commandment. The Eighth Commandment is, "Thou shalt not steal." I think stealing is usually considered to be not that big of a deal. Especially if it is only stealing a few dollars off of our tax returns, a few items from work, a few minutes on our timecards, or a few extra moments after our break ends. We steal someone else's time by being negligently late for an appointment; we steal influence or favor through manipulation, guilt, flattery, or intimidation. We steal from the internet, from big corporations, or "the rich." As believers we steal from others when we hold back the love, kindness, and generosity that we owe to all people. A disciple of Jesus even stole a few coins from the money box now and then. As I heard in a recent movie, "Everyone steals." So what's the big deal? Moreover, some of our biggest heroes are thieves. From Robin Hood to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, to Captain Jack Sparrow—we love thieves! They are dashing, daring, intriguing, cool, clever, and always one step ahead of the law. Going back to at least the tale of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, mankind has always had a love affair with thieves (that is, as long as it's not our stuff being stolen). Plus, seeing how corrupt big business and government are, why shouldn't the little guy grab his piece of the pie when he has the opportunity and ability? Coming on the heels of "Thou shalt not murder," and "Thou shalt not commit adultery," stealing does not look so bad. Yet, as quoted above, Judas was a thief.

Thus, we need to consider the Scripture's portrayal of stealing in order to rightly consider how evil it truly is. In both testaments of the Bible false prophets and teachers are called thieves: "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,' says the LORD, 'who steal My words every one from his neighbor," (Jer. 23:30). Rather than honestly take God's Word and give it to the people, the false prophet dealt in the currency of stolen words. Jesus said of false teachers, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber... All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them... The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly," (Jn 10:1, 8, 10). False teaches are false in that they offer lies instead of the truth, and thereby they do the work of Satan, the father of lies (Jn 8:44).

Likewise, corrupt rulers are said to be thieves: "Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them," (Isa. 1:23). When those in authority do not do their duty to justly enforce the laws equally on all their constituents; whatever caused them to pervert justice is in effect a bribe; whether it is actual money or just the promise of more votes makes no difference—it is a bribe. Bribery is stealing. Jesus similarly rebuked the rulers of the temple when He cleansed it the second time, "And He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," but you have made it a den of thieves," (Matt. 21:13). Rather than seeking to facilitate worship, the elders of Israel were using religion to plunder the people. They were stealing from them. The great danger of all human governments is when rulers use their power to steal wealth. Democracy is just as susceptible to the sin of stealing as any other form of government. As noted in "The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic," democracy ends when the citizens discover that through the vote they can steal from the public treasury.

But perhaps the most damning indictment of the evil of stealing is when we consider the fact that the greatest sin of all time, the betrayal of Christ, was in effect an act of manstealing by Judas Iscariot, who sold Jesus to the Jews for thirty pieces of silver: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So, from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him," (Matt. 26:14-16). The man who was merely a thief committed the worst sin the world has ever known. May God grant that we guard our hearts from the great evil of stealing!



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#### WITNESSES OF GODLINESS

Sunday Morning · January 21, 2024

THE LORD'S DAY Sunday Morning, January 21, 2024

PROVIDENCE PCA

# The Celebration of Worship



# Prelude & Welcome

# **Reflection & Preparation**

Psalm 32::1-6

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# Call to Worship

Psalm 105

Leader

He remembers His covenant forever, The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant,

All When they went from one nation to another, From one kingdom to another people, He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, Saying, "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm."

Leader

For He remembered His holy promise, And Abraham His servant. He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness.

He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, And they inherited the labor of the nations, That they might observe His statutes And keep His laws. Praise the LORD!

#### Invocation

# Hymn

I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer  $Art \cdot Trinity 168$ 

# The Sacrament of Baptism

Benjamin Charles Zgorzynski, presented by his parents, Joseph and Bethany

Vows for Covenant Baptism

- Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of :Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?-
- Do you claim God's covenant promises on his behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation, as you do for your own?
- Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before him a godly example, that you will pray with and for him, that you will teach him the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?

### **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

# Song

Thy Mercy My God ⋅ Insert

# **Worship in Giving**

Offertory

Be Still and Know · Michael John Trotta
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# Hymn

Great Is Thy Faithfulness · Trinity 32

# **Pastoral Prayer**

#### Sermon

The Vindication of Sarah  $\,\cdot\,\,$  Dr. Ray E. Heiple, Jr.

Genesis 20:1-18 NKJV

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar.

- Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.
- But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."
- But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?
- Did he not say to me, `She is my sister '? And she, even she herself said,`He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."
- And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.
- Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."
- So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid.
- And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done."
- Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"
- And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.
- But indeed she is truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.
- And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, `This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother.""
- Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him.
- And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you."
- Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; indeed this vindicates you before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.
- So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore children;
- for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Notes

## Hymn

O Come, My Soul, Bless Thou the Lord · Trinity 321

#### Benediction & Postlude

Following the service, the elders will be available to pray with you at the front of the sanctuary.