

I.N.I.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 18, 2019
Exodus 20:17

In Christ Jesus, Who as our Shepherd laid down His life for us His sheep, thereby paying for the guilt and punishment of our sins, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Disney has had some pretty bad villains, from Cruella de Vil who tried to kill 101 Dalmatians for fur coats, to Maleficent who tried to kill Sleepy Beauty, to the Evil Queen who tried to do away with Snow White. But none of them can hold a candle to the Green-eyed monster. For this monster is no fictitious character, no make-believe fairy tale villain. It is real. Watch out for the green-eyed monster. He is sneaky, cunning, and tricky. He lurks in the best of homes and hearts. He destroyed King Ahab, King Herod, Judas and has attacked every man, woman, boy and girl that ever lived.

Who is this green-eyed monster? It is none other than our own sinful ***greed, envy and lust!***

In the 9th & 10th commandments the Lord tells us: **“You shall not covet!”** To covet means to have a sinful craving or sinful desire for something; being consumed with wanting something you can't have or would have to sin to get. Symptoms of coveting are: pouting, jealousy, envy, worry, anxiety, discontentment and dissatisfaction. So who of us has ever succumbed to the green-eyed monster of greed and coveting? Raise your hand!

If we are honest with ourselves we would all have to answer that we all have succumbed over and over again to greed and coveting throughout our lives. Being jealous of what others have; worrying about not having enough; being dissatisfied with what we do have; not being content and pouting when we don't get what we want are all the actions that we see in our lives that come from a heart filled with coveting.

In our first Scripture reading this morning we heard of the very sad story of a king who was destroyed by the green-eyed monster. He coveted his neighbor's property and that led to pouting, lies, injustice, stealing and outright murder. Naboth did nothing wrong in refusing to sell his property to the king. King Ahab should have been content with that answer and sought a vineyard from someone else. But his greed took over his heart and it brought about Naboth's murder.

But this greed and coveting brought about much more in the lives of Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. The prophet Elijah was sent to the king and prophesied to him that because of his wicked murder of Naboth, Ahab's posterity—his sons—who were just like their father in their wickedness and unbelief, would be cut off, put to death. But there would be more—an even greater punishment would befall the two of them to show God's anger over against their sin and His justice. The LORD decreed **"IN THE PLACE WHERE DOGS LICKED THE BLOOD OF NABOTH, DOGS SHALL LICK YOUR BLOOD, EVEN YOURS....AND CONCERNING JEZEBEL THE LORD ALSO SPOKE, SAYING, 'THE DOGS SHALL EAT JEZEBEL BY THE WALL OF JEZREEL.'**

King Ahab was wounded in battle in his chariot and he died. We are told: **SO THE KING DIED, AND WAS BROUGHT TO SAMARIA. AND THEY BURIED THE KING IN SAMARIA. THEN SOMEONE WASHED THE CHARIOT AT A POOL IN SAMARIA, AND THE DOGS LICKED UP HIS BLOOD ...ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD WHICH HE HAD SPOKEN.**

Jezebel also met her prophesied end when sometime later King Jehu called for the citizens to throw her down from a second story window and by the time they got around to burying her we are told: **SO THEY WENT TO BURY HER, BUT THEY FOUND NO MORE OF HER THAN THE SKULL AND THE FEET AND THE PALMS OF HER HANDS. THEREFORE THEY CAME BACK AND TOLD HIM. AND HE SAID, "THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD, WHICH HE SPOKE BY HIS SERVANT ELIJAH THE TISHBITE, SAYING, 'ON THE PLOT OF GROUND AT JEZREEL DOGS SHALL EAT THE FLESH OF JEZEBEL;'"**

Quite a gory and gruesome lesson. This lesson teaches us that God is indeed serious about His commandments. It is not a trifling thing or a light matter when we sin, when we break God's Laws. These are His sacred, holy words; His unchangeable commands. Those who fight against them, those who despise them; those who intentionally, willfully break them will be visited with God's punishment, if not here in time, hereafter in eternity.

God our Father commands us to be like Him, not only in our actions and words, but also in our thoughts and desires. He says: **'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY.** Jesus repeats this command in the New Testament when He says, **BE PERFECT, THEREFORE, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT.** Perfect not only in what you do and in what you say, but also in what you think and what you desire.

The man in our Gospel reading this morning thought that he had kept all the commandments. He felt he had done all that the Law demanded, but when Jesus said, **"IF YOU WANT TO BE PERFECT, GO, SELL WHAT YOU HAVE AND GIVE TO THE POOR, AND YOU WILL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN; AND COME, FOLLOW ME,"** he realized that it was impossible. His heart was shown to be a selfish heart, one that cared more for itself than for its neighbor. He was rich and did not want to part with his riches and give them to others. Jesus clearly showed to him and to all the world that perfection cannot come from within, it cannot come from within our hearts for our hearts are by nature selfish and self-centered. Even the disciples, who knew Jesus as their Savior, had to respond to Jesus' words with the shocking question: **"WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?"**

If the rich young man had only known the Scriptures which tell us: **THE IMAGINATION OF MAN'S HEART IS EVIL FROM HIS YOUTH...BUT WE ARE ALL LIKE AN UNCLEAN THING, AND ALL OUR RIGHTEOUSNESSES ARE LIKE FILTHY RAGS;...FOR THERE IS NOT A JUST MAN ON EARTH WHO DOES GOOD AND DOES NOT SIN... FOR I KNOW THAT IN ME (THAT IS, IN MY FLESH) NOTHING GOOD DWELLS;... BEHOLD, I WAS BROUGHT FORTH IN INIQUITY, AND IN SIN MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME... WE ALL ONCE CONDUCTED OURSELVES IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH, FULFILLING THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND OF THE MIND, AND WERE BY NATURE CHILDREN OF WRATH, JUST AS THE OTHERS...THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE, THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME CORRUPT; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.**

These words apply to all of us, to every single one of us and every person on the earth. The most common belief of mankind is not a belief in Christ, but a belief in self. "I can accomplish what I want. I can fulfill my destiny and earn my way. I can be good enough to gain for myself that eternal reward." That is nothing but the Devil's teaching that has deceived mankind ever since the fall. This kind of belief leads only to eternal damnation. James says: **FOR WHOEVER SHALL KEEP THE WHOLE LAW, AND YET STUMBLE IN ONE POINT, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL.**

So can anyone be saved by the Law? No, no! That must be clear and that is what Jesus was trying to make clear to the rich, young man. That is also why we have had this 2 month study of God's Ten Commandments. The Law is first and foremost a mirror for us. It teaches us and shows us the most difficult thing in this world to learn and for us to accept—the realization that we are lost and condemned sinners, unable to save ourselves. It shows us that not only are our actions and words not pure and holy but also our thoughts, motives and desires are very often far from pure and holy. We don't become sinners when we sin, we sin because we are sinners! It is not a pretty picture---that image in the mirror of the law---yet we must look at it or we are lost, we must see it or we cannot be saved. Without the knowledge of our sins, there can be no knowledge of and trust in a Savior from sin.

That is also why we need to look again and again to Jesus and the Good News of the Gospel. That is our only source of comfort, consolation and joy. All of these commandments which we cannot and have not kept, Jesus did! He kept every one of them perfectly in all of His thoughts, motives and desires. He kept all of them in all of His actions and He kept all of them in all of His words. That is why Paul writes: **FOR CHRIST IS THE END (fulfillment) OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.** Jesus kept the Law perfectly for us and through faith---placed into our hearts---His perfection, His righteousness.

But as you know Jesus did even more. The Law was kept; it was fulfilled, but what about the curse? **THE SOUL WHO SINS SHALL DIE...FOR THE WAGES—the payment--OF SIN IS DEATH.** Jesus made the payment. Jesus paid the price! **CHRIST HAS REDEEMED US—bought us back--FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW, HAVING BECOME A CURSE FOR US (FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE").**

Quite often you will run into people who think they have us Christians cornered when they say, "Well if God is love as you say, then how could this loving God ever damn anyone to hell? That would be the most unloving thing to ever do!" Is there an answer to that? Of course there is!

Our answer: If God was not love He would not have given us His Son as our only way of escape from His wrath. He would not have sacrificed His only begotten Son for us as our atoning sacrifice. But He could not leave us dead in sin and headed for hell. His amazing, boundless love would not allow it. **"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE."** Out of love He also sent the Holy Spirit to take this message of His saving love in Christ and plant it into our hearts and create faith.

Whose fault is it then when people do not listen to His Word, or do not believe what they have heard and therefore do not believe in Jesus Christ and are lost in eternal damnation? Certainly not Gods! The unbeliever damns himself through His unbelief and that damnation is carried out by God on judgment day.

We look once more to these last two commandments and see that God wants us to have only holy desires and to be content with what we have. Having been brought to faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with our Savior's love which then fills us with the desire to want to serve others and gives us contentment so that we can in love help our neighbor keep what is his. Let us pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Our study of Your Law these past 2 months has shown us like a mirror the scars and spots of sin that covers every one of us. Your Law, Your Commandments, like crashing thunder makes us cringe with fear, for we cannot stand before You in our own righteousness, for we have none! You command "Be holy because I am holy" but then Jesus prepared that holiness for us. So our fear You have changed to trust and our sorrow You have turned to joy. For You have brought to us lost and condemned sinners the glorious message of salvation—free salvation—earned for us by Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May this simple Good News of our salvation—the Gospel of Christ's perfect life, crucifixion and rising again—be our hope, confidence and trust all the days of our lives until we live with You forever in our heavenly home above. May Christ's love for us lead us to live a life of contentment and serving love according to Your commandments. May our life of sanctification pattern itself after Christ's life of selfless love for us.

Amen.