

Recycling Greed
Prov 31:10-31, Mark 6:32-44

Friends, there once was a man who fell asleep and had a dream – in his dream he was met by an angel who lead him down a hall and showed him a room at the end of the hall. In this room was a massive dining table filled with all sorts of delicious food.

The only problem was this table was so big that the food could only be reached by a 10' spoon.

So the people in this room were miserable and starving, and lonely – in spite of all the food. Because while they could reach the food in the middle of the table... the spoons were too long to use to feed themselves.

The angel then lead the man back down the hall to its opposite end and showed him another room. This room too had a massive table filled with all sorts of delicious food.

However the people in this room were happy, well fed and enjoying each other's company because while the spoons were too long to feed yourself with they were the perfect length to feel someone else across the table.

The angel turned to the man and said – this is heaven, that other room – that was hell.

You see friends the deadly sin of Greed causes us to experience hell on earth.

Think back to 2008 when the global financial crisis hit. The fallout was devastating to people, to communities.

People lost their life savings, people lost their jobs, companies went bankrupt, cities and towns went bankrupt unable to provide essential services, people had to walk away from their homes... friends, communities were literally destroyed.

Now hearing about it on the news is one thing, but when you see those pictures of abandoned subdivisions and golf courses

down in the US, the reality of destroyed community really hits you.

Now the forensic accountants can explain in their technical terms exactly what lead up to the stock market crashed and why it affected economies all around the world...

But you and I know that the main reason the economic crisis hit and hit hard was because of Greed.

Mortgage Lenders who were greedy for more profit approved loans for people who really couldn't afford them; the people who couldn't afford the loans accepted them anyways because they were only thinking about short term gains...

These risky "investments" were then sold up the food chain to other financial institutions who were looking for a quick profit on their money. Eventually when the people who couldn't afford their mortgages anymore went broke... the whole thing collapsed, taking down banks, businesses and economies all over the world – and we've yet to fully recover from it.

And at this point friends, we in North American have finally began to question Gordon Gekko's famous quote from the 80's movie Wall Street where he says...

"Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit.

Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A."

Friends we could summarize this as "In Greed we Trust" what a lie!

But the sad truth friends is that people have to get hurt, communities have to be destroyed, national economies have to teeter on the edge of bankruptcy before we begin to understand this is false, Greed is not good – it is in fact Hell on earth.

So... what's the solution? Do we renounce money, renounce banks, renounce profit, do we renounce Wall Street and throw our hats in with a reactive movement like Occupy? If Greed isn't good anymore, than what is? We're not sure...

But friends, as we have done with each of the deadly sins we must ask "what is good that sin is twisting in us to produce Greed?" That will show us what is good and what we can turn to instead of Greed.

And I think we can get a sense of that from our passage in Proverbs 31 where we have a description of a most industrious wife who excels at providing for her family.

Not only is she a hardworking talented tradeswoman and an effective administrator but she's got a nose for business.

"She considers a field and buys it" (vs 16) "She sees that her trading is profitable" (vs 18) "She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.(vs 24)

Then she takes her profit and uses those profits to create more income generating opportunities which increase her estate. *"out of her earnings she plants a vineyard." (vs 16)*

You can bet that her family will enjoy fruit, wine, and that she will be selling some of that fruit and wine at a profit and reinvesting again.

And the writer of Proverbs holds her up as an example of wisdom personified, someone who is very skilled at providing all that is needed to sustain a family, someone who contributes what is needed to build a community, to give people jobs, to store up for hard times, and to have enough left over to help others in need and He praises this...

*"Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."³⁰
Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

What she does is good and it is done to honor God – not greed.

But friends when our drive to produce and provided sustenance is warped by sin it becomes Greed... and what we must consume and own to sustain ourselves begins to consume and own us instead.

And it does so in two different ways – we either begin to accumulate for the sake of accumulation - more possessions, more money, more more more... and we boast about how much we have.

Like the foolish farmer in Jesus' parable who says *“This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”* (Luke 12:18-19)

Or... we become miserly and cheap, and like the third servant in Jesus' Parable of the Talents. We squirrel away what we have and we boast about how little we spend on things. You see this is a form of Greed as well.

And this servant reveals what drives this kind of greed when the master comes back to collect his money and the servant says to him *“‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.”* (Matt 25:24)

In other words he says “you’re not going to get a handout from me.” This servant is not going to allow anyone else to benefit from himself or his work in anyway – even the one who gave him what he had – that’s the essence of miserly greed.

And to be honest friends – in light of all that has happened in recent years with the economic downturn, loss of jobs, stock market crash, and in light of the fact that it has made us skeptical about how much we will have saved up for our future.

And given the fact that we are more aware of scarcity now, even the almighty US Gov't doesn't have enough to run the

county without borrowing and accumulating a staggering debt...

Miserly greed is something we need to be more cautious of these days, than the accumulative kind of greed.

It's easy to be generous and give to others, to help out, to give to charity when the economy is booming – but once we realize that resources are scarce, jobs are scarce, gov't funding is scarce, that our supply or our market might share not be as plentiful as we thought....

It's so easy to become greedy, miserly and become tightfisted with what we believe might not be enough to look after ourselves, and to refuse to allow anyone else to benefit from it.

Friends, the only way out of this, the only way to begin to recycle greed and get back to that healthy good drive to produce and provide sustenance which builds community... is to ensure that we really believe the truth about provision.

The truth of the matter is friends that it's not our job, it's not the economy, it's not the gov't, it's not capitalism which provides for our needs in this life... it's our Heavenly Father.

As Jesus says in Matt 6:31; "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Friends the wife of Proverbs 31 is a wonderful example of someone who seeks God's kingdom, because all the wealth and possessions and profit she gains is used to serve others, to create opportunities for others, to help others...

Friends Greed creates hell on earth – but the Kingdom of God is Heaven on earth.

It's not about forsaking money, possessions, business opportunities, investments or profit making – it's about using

them to build others up, to care for the needy, and to give people meaningful work, to allow them and ourselves to fulfill God's original command to Adam and Eve...

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:27)

Friends Recycling Greed, both in its accumulative and miserly forms bring us back that original stewardship that we were created for – it's nothing less than our original purpose.

And once we believe the truth that all we have is supplied by our Heavenly Father, and that our purpose in this world is to be His stewards in developing the creation - we can take some first steps towards making that a reality in our life.

And a good place to learn that from is the story where Jesus tells the disciples to feed the five thousand.

You see the disciples are looking around at all the people who have come to hear Jesus preach and they realize that they are way out in the country and its starting to get on in the day and if Jesus doesn't dismiss the crowds soon they won't be able to get back to towns to get something to eat.

First step friends – becoming aware of and recognizing a need that is around you.

So the disciples go to Jesus with this need to ask him to do something about it... but Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them that they are ministry partners with Him. So He tells them “you give them something to eat!”

Second step friends – coming to the realization that we are His church. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ to the world!

This seems like an overwhelming task for the disciples. They immediately think of it in “Greedy” terms – “are we to spend eight months wages to get all these people some bread?” But

Jesus reminds them they are partners with him – so he asks them instead “How much bread do you actually have?” Turns out they have five loaves of bread, oh and two fish...

Step three friends – Remember and believe when faced with the overwhelming needs that you see around you, that Jesus is our partner – we’re not expected to be able to produce enough sustenance to meet all the need – just start with what we have.

So, you know how this story turns out. Jesus gives thanks for the food – starts to divide it up among the people and it just keeps multiplying, and multiplying, and everyone ends up with something to eat and the disciples gather up twelve baskets of leftovers. In the end, if we count women and children there was probably over 10,000 people who were fed.

So step four – take what little you have and give it to Christ in partnership to meet the need that you see, and let Christ worry about the multiplication to meet the need.

So we can give; we can work to produce and provide sustenance without worrying about running out because Christ can miraculously multiply it!

We are seeking first the Kingdom of God and all that we need is being added along the way.

Friends Christ is God – God is unlimited, God never runs out, God never runs dry, God can always give more – and give more than what is needed.

This is the truth friends! But we need to have faith in it, and faith is being certain of this truth in spite of what we see around us.

In spite of seeing the economic downturn, in spite of seeing no job opportunities, in spite of seeing our savings or pension fund decrease – we believe that Christ is our endless supply for all we need in this life – and especially for the life to come.

And that recycles Greed my friends, and it sets us free to pursue the Kingdom of God – to help bring heaven to earth instead of hell.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you this morning about Greed?

Let's pray...