

Most holy God, we confess that we are great sinners and that we are altogether unworthy of Your grace; for our hearts are all too often filled with the sinful desires of covetousness, and we are not able to walk before You in such holiness and perfection as You demand. Forgive our many trespasses and cleanse our hearts and minds. Cause us to grow continually in true faith and genuine love that we may be filled with only thoughts and desires grounded in the love our Savior, Jesus Christ, has for us and all our neighbors. Amen.

Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath." So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

In Christ Jesus, who in response to our confession of sin is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, dear fellow redeemed:

The Christian Church somewhat smiles as the secular realm uses the designation of "*hate*" crimes. We consider all crimes committed against neighbor to come from an evil heart of hatred, certainly not love. But we do understand the world struggling to make that distinction in the motives behind certain illegal acts and making punishments more severe if they can be proved. In part this is due to the world's usual denial that by nature now after sin entered the world the human race is evil. Or as God observed prior to the flood: "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, ... every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." In general the world thinks man is basically good and is corrupted only through examples, circumstances and associations.

The sinful human heart generates all crimes against neighbor based on sinful desires coming from deep within. Such desires are

called coveting. Our Lord informs us in the letter of James: “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” But our Lord has not stood by to watch us degenerate into this evil abyss. He has come to our rescue by sending His Son. By faith in Him as Savior we find the true and lasting rescue from this deadly cycle within. Considering the 9th and 10th Commandments today let us observe this proper distinction: **Faith Gives Birth to Life/Coveting Gives Birth to Death.**

I

Our text is the story of Achan’s sin and God’s resulting punishment. Achan was an Israelite who fought the battle of Jericho with Joshua. God had commanded the Israelites to destroy the entire city of Jericho because of its great sin and also not to take any of Jericho’s riches. God warned that anyone taking spoils from Jericho would make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. In disobedience Achan stole a beautiful robe and some gold and silver and hid these things in his tent.

Achan’s sin caused God to withdraw His gift of victory to the Israelites in their subsequent self-chosen battle against the small town of Ai, and the Israelites were routed. Thirty-six Israelite men were killed. Joshua confronted Achan and asked him: “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to Him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” As we see at the beginning of our text Achan confessed honestly: “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel” and then proceeded to describe what he had done. Joshua then did what God commanded in His theocratic civil law, Achan and his entire family and all his possessions were destroyed through stoning and then by fire.

Achan’s coveting certainly brought death. What have you been coveting these days? This truly is a sobering question to answer after considering this account. Do you not think Achan had sound reasons to take what was simply going to be left behind in Jericho? He, no doubt, wanted to provide for his family once it finally settled in Judah. After all, they had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and this on top of his ancestors enduring almost thirteen generations in Egyptian enslavement. How could God begrudge this father, grandfather looking out for his descendants?

II

It is easy for us to nurse sinful desires in our hearts finding justification for them even pretending they are righteous thoughts and by excusing them, adding more sins to those well hidden sins of

the heart. The Apostle Paul observed: “if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”

But so serious is coveting as a seed of many other sins, that our Lord gives us two commands regarding coveting. First coveting our neighbor’s home and other possessions and then coveting the service he receives from others. So even if in my sin I can imagine that I have not outwardly broken commands 4 – 8, e.g., rebelled against authority, murdered, been unfaithful to my spouse with another person, have stolen property, or bore false witness, my sinful desires condemn me as having sinned repeatedly against my neighbor.

You do well, my fellow sinners to confess to the same thing which Achan did when he said: “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, ... I coveted.” It was hidden before his fellow Israelites, but God knew his heart, his heart of disobedience. Our Lord witnessed the entire process of Achan’s sin, starting in the heart and leading to the sinful acts of his hands taking and hiding.

Perhaps you are discouraged from confessing to such a thing, now especially, since you see what happened to Achan and his family and all of his possessions. Perhaps you even want to use God’s own words to condemn Him, citing these words from the first letter of John: “If we confess our sins, [our Lord] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Go ahead, God can take it! In truth He wants you to pin Him to all His promises. Just as Jacob pinned Christ to His promises as he returned to this very same promise-land, so God desires that you and I do the same on our way to the land He has secured with His blood for us. But of course you can only do this, if those promises remain fresh in your heart and mind, being confessed and professed through faith privately and in places like here publicly.

While Achan received the threatened civil punishment for his covetousness, thievery and deception in front of the whole company of the Israelites, we have reason to believe that having confessed he was forgiven. Joshua said to Achan before Israel carried out the punishment, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” – “today” not forever, but TODAY. While in reverse – this same word “today” likely was as sweet to Achan as it was for the repentant thief on the cross. Additionally we are told: “Then the LORD turned from his burning anger.”

The heap of stones that covered Achan, his family and his possessions served as a constant reminder of the severity of God’s Law, lest after God gave them victory after victory, they would

conclude that it was by their power and deserving that they were now possessing this land promised first to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This land was more than property upon which the Israelites would enrich themselves materially, it was the gracious staging area where God would secure their salvation. His Son would be conceived and born, would live, teach, be arrested, crucified, would die and rise again in this promise-land for them, you, me, and all sinners – sinners who sin from within to the outward act just like Achan.

Unlike the disciples in today's Gospel, you DO understand these acts of Jesus and trust in them for your salvation. God grant you the grace to keep confessing your many sins as did Achan, with or without being confronted, no matter the consequences, so that you through faith in the forgiveness found alone for you in His Son is received to your everlasting peace and joy. Amen.