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“Deadly Sins: Sloth”

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Matthew 4:18-25

As we continue our journey through Lent examining some of the deadly sins, today we come to the sin of sloth, which is the failure to do what is necessary.

Sloth is intending to do something, but never quite getting around to it.

It is knowing the right thing to do, but not acting upon it.

It is seeing a need and expecting someone else to meet it.

Saying, “It’s not my problem” or “I just don’t care.”

Sloth is a sin of omission.

There are two broad categories of sin— commission—sins you actively commit, and omission—something you know you should do but you do not.

Sometimes all you have to do in order to derail your faith and hurt other people is nothing. Nothing at all. Just convince yourself that someone else will take care of it, it’s not your problem. That is sloth.

Sloths, the mammals which inhabit the rainforests of Central and South America are painfully slow. It takes a sloth an entire month to move a kilometer.

All they do is eat and sleep. They sleep between 15 and 18 hours a day.

It can take a week for them to digest one meal.

In looking for something positive to say about this particular sin, I must say that at times it would be very sweet to be a sloth.

How delightful to do nothing except eat and sleep and eat some more all day long. And there are times in all of our lives when we need to unhook from the relentless demands, deadlines, and schedules in order to restore our souls.

When you are doing too much, burned out, and exhausted, a little slothfulness is in order. Sloth, in moderation, can be good for you if it renews your soul.

But you do not want to stay there, to live that way all the time because that is squandering the God-given gifts you possess.

God did not create us in God’s perfect image so that we could do whatever we feel like doing all the time.

Sloth is seductive and progressive, and ultimately sloth is different from rest.

Sloth comes in several varieties: mental, moral, and spiritual.

Mental sloth is very common in our time.

It afflicts those who will not think for themselves, because they are too lazy to think, read, and critically examine an idea or situation.

They do not enter into challenging dialogue with those who see the world differently, they jump to conclusions quickly.

They take their opinions from those who think exactly the same way they do.

It is a form of prejudice, which advances strong opinions, without taking the trouble to consider opposing opinions or get all the facts.

George Bernard Shaw said that he became a rich man because he had one original idea per year, while most people had one original idea per lifetime.

Mental sloth is very, very common.

Then there is Moral sloth, afflicting those who live by the motto “If it feels good, do it!” We all know children who say, “But everyone else is doing it!”

Moral sloth is doing something just because you can, whether it is right or not.

But there is another component to moral sloth, which is when you see something terribly wrong, but don’t bother to help right it.

Whether violence, poverty, injustice, oppression, you simply cannot be bothered.

They have no moral outrage over the depth and breadth of human suffering.

There is Spiritual sloth, which is actually the most damaging of all, because without nurturing our souls and spirits we forget who we are and whose we are. Ignoring spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, silence, meditation, study, can completely dry up the wells of peace and well being from our souls.

Biblically, slothfulness of any kind is equated not only with laziness, but with a deliberate and willful sort of laziness.

The Bible has many accounts of people who intentionally squandered what God had given them, through lose living, or deliberate choice.

And in nearly every case, these people end up miserable in the end.

So what form of sloth do you most struggle with?

A 28 year old woman defined the sloth of her generation of young adults like this:

“We struggle with sloth through the Internet. We feel busy and important when checking each other’s Facebook pages and blogs, but when it comes to actually doing things we can’t seem to find the time.

It is amazing how much time is wasted in front of the computer.”

Then she said: “Sloth begins as an excuse, continues as a habit, and ends as a cage.”

It may not be Facebook for you, but it might be your I Phone or Blackberry, or

workaholism or a habit that is destroying you. But it drives you away from others,  
from yourself and from God.

Sloth feeds upon itself, it is habit forming, which makes it hard for people to  
actively change or improve their lives.

According to M. Scott Peck, sloth is the reason most relationships fail.

People are not willing to put forth the effort anymore.

People just don't want to take the time or invest the energy to change,  
to communicate deeply, to spend time together, really get to know one another.

They cannot find the energy because they just don't care.

*Ennui* is a French word for boredom, which conveys the true nature of sloth.

Ennui is the attitude that nothing is exciting, engaging or worthy of involvement.

You know it all, you've seen it all, why bother?

Writes Dorothy Sayers, "Sloth seems appealing, but it leads to utter despair.

It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment.

It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing,  
loves nothing, hates nothing finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and only  
remains alive because there is nothing it would die for."

Indeed, the slothful person is bored by the world's cries of pain.

In the face of the world's tragedies, sloth is apathy. It is a refusal to involve  
oneself in the realities, needs, suffering, and challenges of others.

One of the best definitions of all comes from Thomas Aquinas, who called sloth  
*acedia*, which means "not caring."

Not caring can be more dangerous, even than hatred.

If you hate someone, you are connected to them, at least in a negative way.

With hatred there is engagement and feeling—you respond to another on some level

With apathy and indifference, you do not even account for the other's existence.

In that regard, sloth is the worse sin of all—not caring.

Of course, not caring has no place in the Christian life.

Our calling is just the opposite, to care about everyone and everything.

Caring about what God cares about, pretty much covers it all.

Most of us find it easy to care about our families, neighbors, co-workers, and  
friends.

But we are also called to care about people, who are ugly and unlovable,  
people who are beaten up by life, oppressed, people who are different and strange.

In our Scripture lesson today we heard about the call of disciples.

Jesus is walking along the beach at the Sea of Galilee and he calls out to two brothers, Simon and Andrew who are fishing and invites them to become fishers of humanity. Shortly he came across another pair of brothers, James and John the sons of Zebedee.

Jesus made the same offer to them and they were just as quick to follow. Everyone he invited followed him, knowing with him they would find a fuller, richer life than anything they had ever known. The Message says that when Jesus first called them he said, "Come, follow me, I will make a new kind of fisher out of you. I will show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They did not ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed."

They knew it would not be easy. To walk away from everything they had known, to suffer, endure hardship, hunger, thirst, rejection, misunderstanding. Life would be much harder for them, much more challenging and difficult. But they did it.

They shook off their inertia, their comfortable lives and followed him.

Now week after week after week this church gives you opportunities to shake off your inertia to follow Jesus, because we too have been called. Those of you who are members stood up here and promised to support this church with your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. We learned last week on Missions Sunday about all our church is doing to make a difference, and about all of the opportunities to put our faith in action. You can join us at our meeting today at 11:30 to learn more about our ministry to Homeless Families and you can work with them the first week in May. You can show up at 9:00 this Saturday for our All Church Work Day. You can bring food for the hungry and items for our health kids for Haiti. You can help with our Habitat Build later in April, and go on a Mission Trip. My prayer is that every single member of this church will find a way to be engaged in some sort of mission beyond this church this year, so that we can truly bless this world.

Thinking about sloth this week both inspired me and convicted me. I realized that my sloth is sometimes manifested by being too busy (With the exception of those days I lay in bed all day eating ice cream). I know that sounds ironic, but I think I use my busy schedule and the tyranny of the urgent, as an excuse not to do more to serve beyond these walls. Although I get to help people here at the church nearly every day-- that's my job.

I do not do enough of that in my free time. I am not as intentional as I should be about witnessing and practicing my faith by reaching out to those in need. It has been 3 years since I went on a Mission Trip to Guatemala so this year I will go to Espanola, New Mexico with a Team in late April.

I am going to do more with Interfaith Hospitality Network, and in May our Staff is going to do a Service project at Redemption Fellowship, which serves the homeless and needy in downtown Denver.

I want to be more intentional about making time to serve those who suffer, beyond what I do as a part of my job.

Alfred North Whitehead said religion is what people do with their solitude. And Jesus said true religion is to care for widows and orphans, to care for the hungry, sick, sad and lost.

When Jesus separates the sheep from the goats in Matthew's gospel, he sends the sheep to an eternal **reward** because he was hungry and they fed him, sick and they visited him, naked and they clothed him.

The goats on the other hand saw him hungry, sick, naked, imprisoned and did absolutely nothing. They were sloths in goats clothing, and Jesus condemns them to eternal punishment. Their sin was not caring.

You have some homework this week.

I want you to do one thing that you know you should do, but have not done.

It might be something you have been putting off for a long time.

It can be as simple as cleaning out your closet, because the Jeffco Action Center Beautiful Junk Sale is coming up next weekend and they need your stuff to sell. You could call that person who drives you nuts and say "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you." You can reach out to a neighbor, spend time with the elderly or a child, do something you know you should do but have not done and then email me at [Pastor@lumc.net](mailto:Pastor@lumc.net) and let me know about it. Let me know what you did to overcome your sloth.

My friends, all of us, like those first disciples, have been called to follow Jesus.

That is not an easy thing to do.

It means stepping out in faith, taking risks, forgetting ourselves and pushing ourselves to do things that we would rather not do.

It means overcoming our inclination toward laziness and not caring.

We continue our journey through Lent, a season which reminds us of our

weakness and sin, as we prepare to follow Jesus to the cross.  
This journey reminds us that there is hope for sloths like us.

Resurrection is on the way.