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“Deadly Sins: Gluttony”

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Luke 12:22-24
John 6:35-38

We are moving right along through the deadly sins during Lent this year, and today we come to gluttony. Who does not enjoy the sin of gluttony? Just lock me in a room surrounded by hot fudge sundaes and I will be fine. I have to confess that gluttony is something I struggle with. I know that might seem silly to you because I am tall and thin—I would not appear to have this problem. But gluttony is a frequent temptation for me. Just this week past when I was thinking about preaching on gluttony, I had a lunch at a restaurant I just love, and they have the best bread in the world. So before my lunch arrived I had two huge pieces of bread and was feeling full, but of course I ate every bite of my lunch anyway, and because we were celebrating a birthday, I had dessert too. Being full never stops me from eating! I have been known to eat every single bite of a Chipotle burrito and there ought to be a law against that. I can eat an entire pan of brownies, an entire box of Girl Scout cookies, and when it comes to chocolate, well, you get the picture. Pastors are prone to gluttony, because we are surrounded by good food and good cooks all the time, and you cannot risk hurting people’s feelings by passing up their food. Donuts, cookies, cake, treats surround us in abundance, and many people who work in churches struggle with this. Rev. Wayne Smith, former pastor of Southland Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky quite openly struggled with gluttony. He was a very popular and well known pastor who also preached a sermon series on deadly sins. His congregation was very eager to hear what he had to say about gluttony, because Rev. Smith is 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighs about 285 pounds. His congregation loved him dearly, and they knew this was an issue for him. In his sermon about gluttony told this story:

“One day my secretary received a phone call, and the caller said: ‘I would like to speak with that Head Hog.’ She was offended and said, ‘I know Pastor Smith is heavy, but referring to him as the Head Hog is terribly disrespectful.’ ‘I apologize,’ he said, ‘Please let me explain. I am a hog farmer south of Lexington. I raise prize hogs and just sold 10 of them for \$2,000 each. I have been watching your services on television and really like your pastor. So I wanted to donate the money from the sale of two of my

hogs, totaling \$4,000 to your church.’ After a moment of silence the church secretary said, “Please hold on sir, the Big Fat Pig just walked through the door.” In his sermon Rev. Smith went on to say this: “Does being over 100 pounds overweight bother me? More than you know. Physically, mentally and spiritually. Does it hurt my Christian witness? Of course it does. It is hard to sell a product you do not use and a religion of wholeness that you do not live. Am I a hypocrite? Yes. How can I preach if I am a hypocrite? If only the perfect bird sang in the forest, it would be completely quiet there. If only perfect preachers stood in pulpits, we would have no message whatsoever. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Is that an excuse? No, it is a statement of guilt, and also why I preach the Gospel.”

So we are all gluttons in one way or another. Overindulgence is the norm in our society that is why gluttony is such an enormous problem (so to speak). When it comes to gluttony, Americans get the gold medal, we take the cake. Portion sizes have grown increasingly larger in the last decade, and it is far too easy to eat too much. You can cheaply Super Size your order, which always gives you the best value for your money. All you can eat buffets are everywhere. Check out the Burger King “Quad Stacker,” which is 4 meat patties, 4 piece of cheese, topped with sauce and bacon. (Show picture of Quad Stacker) Wendy’s offers the Baconator, which is quite similar to the Quad Stacker, only with more calories. This cup holds the 7-11s Big Gulp—64 ounces, the equivalent of one day’s worth of liquid in one drink. I can hardly get my hand around it—can anybody drink this much slurpee or pop? And you have heard of the food pyramid, right? This is the Wisconsin food pyramid. (Show photo of beer, sausage and cheese).

This is how we live in America, and the irony is that we are always trying to lose weight. We are schizophrenic about food, which is why the top selling books in our country are cookbooks and diet books. We spend billions on junk food, and billions on diet programs and diet foods. 65% of us are currently overweight and by 2015 that number will rise to 75% according to Johns Hopkins University. This is not a good thing, and it is taking it’s toll on our nation and our children. Gluttony is detrimental to our minds, bodies, spirits and relationships.

Now I need to make it very clear that being a glutton and being overweight are not necessarily the same thing. Some people are overweight

through no fault of their own, due to hormonal imbalances, health conditions, metabolism, or genetics, so obesity and gluttony are not synonymous. You can be a glutton like me and still be thin. Gluttony is more of a preoccupation, more of an insatiable hunger that is never fully satisfied.

Gluttony comes from the Latin word “gluttire” which means to gulp down. When you think of gulping, you think of someone who does not even taste something or savor it, simply inhales it. Dogs do this; just give your dog a piece of meat and you will understand gulping down. Gluttony is consuming more than you need, far more than it takes to be satisfied, more than your fair share. Gluttony is consuming to the point that it hurts you, that it actually robs you of enjoyment and pleasure. Gluttony, according to Maxie Dunnam is misplaced hunger. It is an inner longing which can never be satisfied with one bite, one serving, a whole pie, cake, or pizza. And gluttony applies not only to what we put into our bodies, but what we put into our minds. It applies to gadgets, technology, the internet, gambling, TV, shopping, all forms of self indulgence. Writes Richard Halloway:

“The person who talks too much, the compulsive prattler who invades every silence with uninterruptible talk, is as much a glutton as the person who cannot stop eating. The glutton has lost all balance and proportion and cannot view all natural appetites as instincts that have to be balanced by other considerations. When such things are given so much power, they end up dominating the entire personality. The tragedy is that in the end the glutton is deprived of the pleasures that initially were so tempting and tantalizing.” (*Seven to flee, Seven to follow* by Richard Holloway).

Well, the Bible does have a lot to say about lack of self control, the preoccupation with the wrong things, and the belief that our life gains meaning from what we consume or possess. In the very beginning, in the story about the Garden of Eden God tells Adam and Eve, “You are living in the midst of an all you can eat buffet. You can have all you want in this garden, except for just one thing. One thing is off limits, but everything else is yours.” Well, you know what happens. That one thing becomes the only thing they really want. And Adam and Eve are willing to sacrifice paradise for the bite of one silly apple. That is just how we are, always wanting what we should not have.

Then there are the Israelites, freed from slavery in Egypt, taken through

the Red Sea and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Remember how God provides for them in the wilderness? God gives them manna, bread, and every day God gives them exactly what they need for that day. After awhile the Israelites come to Moses and say, “We are sick to death of manna! We cannot eat it anymore. Back in Egypt we had cucumbers and leeks and melons. We want to go back to Egypt.” They were slaves in Egypt! But they are willing to return to slavery just to satisfy their appetites.

Many of us become enslaved to our appetites and desires, but not Jesus. You may remember from 2 weeks ago we learned that Jesus was sent out into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and 40 nights. Early on, when he has had nothing to eat, the devil comes to him and says, “Hey, aren’t you hungry? You could do whatever you want, so take this stone and turn it into bread. You can easily break your fast.” Jesus says: “You shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” And then in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says: “Do not be so anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear. There is so much more to life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your appearance than your clothes. Consider the birds, they neither sow nor reap, and yet God feeds them, and you are of much more value than the birds!”

The point is not to obsess about these things and make your desires your Gods. Do not bow down to what you most desire, because then you begin to worship it and can never get enough of it. St. Francis of Assisi referred to his body as “brother ass.” He meant that the body is not very smart sometimes, and it was meant to be a servant of the mind and the spirit. The body deserves attention and reverence but it should be our servant, not our master.

In this sermon series I have tried each week to find a corresponding virtue to these deadly sins. I said Pride can be a very good thing and most appropriate when it is not lifting you up while putting others down. I said that Envy can motivate us to do better and push ourselves harder. But I had trouble coming up with something positive about gluttony. I finally decided that the best thing about gluttony is that in the end, it makes you sick. Eventually you have to stop because your body tells you ENOUGH! We have a natural shut-off valve in our bodies and minds, which can save us.

So the first and most important antidote to the insatiable desire of

gluttony is to remember that you are so much more than your desires. You are also a soul, a spirit, and there is a larger purpose for your life than indulging every desire. Give your obsessions to God, rise above incessant self-indulgence, and trust that there will always be enough.

Another antidote is to practice eating less than you think you need. Most of us will not starve to death if we ate much smaller portions. When you eat in restaurants, split the meal or take half of it home. Eat slowly. Wait 15 minutes before you have that second helping or dessert. Michael Pollan is a very popular food guru and has written several books, his latest is Food Rules, which is essentially 64 rules for healthy eating. Pollan's simple mantra is this: "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants." One of the rules is interesting: "It is not really food if it is called the same thing in every single language on earth." Big Mac, Cheetos, Twinkies, maybe even the Baconator or Quad Stacker or Slurpee—those things, according to Pollan, are not food.

Of course as people of faith we must remember those who never have enough food and no choice about what they eat. Growing up some of our mothers said, "Eat your broccoli, there are children starving in India," and it's true. But instead of motivating us to lick our plates clean, starving children should motivate us to eat less and live more intentionally. Grossly overfed people cannot be too concerned about the needs of the poor, feasting and wasting food while malnourished children cry out for lack of bread.

Finally, and this is most important thing of all, identify exactly what it is that you are hungry for. Examine the deepest longing of your heart that you are constantly trying to fill with other things.

I heard about a young woman who doubled her weight in one year. It was the year she turned 12 years old and her parents divorced, and she moved to a new community, and 3 of her grandparents died. What was she hungry for? Comfort, love, security, stability? Before her death, Princess Diana was interviewed by the BBC and she quite openly discussed her struggle with bulimia. This gorgeous Princess who appeared to have everything said, "I had bulimia for years, a secret disease that you inflict upon yourself because you have so little self esteem and you do not think you are worthy or valuable. You fill up your stomach 4 or 5 times a day, and it comforts you. But then you feel disgusted and ashamed and you want to get rid of it." Diana said that in the end it was always a temporary comfort, a pattern which

only made her feel worse. We know exactly what she was starving for—not food, but someone to love her, accept her and cherish her. And that is, of course, what we are all hungry for.

There are antidotes to gluttony—getting sick, trusting in God’s provision, deliberately eating and consuming less, and really identifying what we are most hungry for. Yet the best of all is that for us, there is one who wants to fill us up, one who said, “I am the bread of life and those who eat of me will never go hungry.” This is the spiritual nourishment we long for, and it is freely available to us now. May we be filled and satisfied as we receive this incredible gift from God.