

One of the most delightful books I have read recently was by Tom Lutz:
Doing Nothing, A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America.

Some of the chapter headings are these: Loafers, Communists, Drinkers,
Bohemians, Beatniks, Bums, Surfers, Hippies, Playboys, Draft Dodgers,
Couch-potatoes, Good offs, and Freeloaders.

It’s a great book—which can help you feel very good about your own inclinations
toward laziness, indolence and sloth.

Doing Nothing. It just has a restful sound to it, doesn’t it?

When was the last time you did absolutely nothing, while you were still awake?
It can be a very good thing to do unhook from the relentless demands of duties,
deadlines, and schedules to do nothing in order to restore our souls and spirits.

But today we are examining those who have made doing nothing an art form,
those who have completely squandered what gifts God has given them.

As we continue our journey through Lent, looking at the
temptations we all face at one time or another, today’s temptation is that of sloth.

The word is taken from a slow moving mammal which inhabits the
tropical rainforests of South and Central America.

I don’t know if you have ever seen a sloth, they are not too common in Lakewood.
(Show photos of various jungle sloths)

They have the distinction of being known as the laziest mammals on earth.
Of course laziness is a human construct which we project upon the poor sloth,
but consider this: It takes a sloth an entire month to move just one kilometer.

They eat leaves and fruit, but it’s hard to find the time to eat, because
sloths sleep between 15 and 18 hours a day.

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

There are 5 different species, some two toed, some three toed.

They spend the majority of their lives hanging upside down in trees.

They eat, sleep, mate, and give birth upside down.

I think it would be a sweet and relaxing life to be a sloth.

In fact, some days I envy (which was last weeks temptation) the sloth,
if you didn’t have human beings around to judge your behavior.

I imagine myself retiring to a tropical climate only to sleep
all day long, waking up just long enough to eat.

No responsibilities, no worries, no commitments. Heaven on earth.

Unfortunately, God did not create us in God's image just so that we could sleep and eat. We are here to do more than take up space.

Human beings were created to give glory to God and leave this world much better than we found it.

Slothful behavior is not just relaxing and taking time to restore our souls, which we all need to do from time to time.

Sloth is squandering our God-given gifts on mindless self-indulgence.

God did not create us so that we could do whatever we feel like doing.

That is precisely why sloth is such a deadly temptation for human beings.

It squanders everything God has given us.

It mocks God's gifts and purposes for humanity by refusing to acknowledge them.

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

Mental sloth is very common in our time.

It afflicts those who will not bother to think for themselves.

They are too lazy to think, read, and examine an idea or situation.

They do not enter into challenging dialogue with those who see the world differently.

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.

Liberals & Conservatives, Democrats & Republicans can suffer from mental sloth.

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 common.

Then there is Moral sloth, afflicting those who see something terribly wrong, but don't bother to help right it. Whether violence, poverty, injustice, oppression, they are just too busy to be bothered.

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

There is Spiritual sloth, which is actually the most damaging of all.

Neglecting our souls and spirits exacts a terrible price.

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.

M. Scott Peck is a psychiatrist and a Christian author who says that
 laziness is a primary source of psychological illness.
 He says that sloth feeds upon itself, and creates a climate of inertia.
 It is habit forming, which makes it hard for people to actively improve their lives.
 And, according to Peck, laziness is the reason why most relationships fail.
 People are not willing to put forth any effort.
 People just don't want to take the time or invest the energy to change,
 to communicate deeply,
 spend time together, really get to know the inner reality of 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.

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, 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.

We are called to care so much that it breaks our hearts over and over again.

Jesus, of course was very clear. We are to care about the hungry, thirsty,
homeless, naked, sick and imprisoned.

Sometimes I wish Jesus had not said it, but he did:

“Whenever you failed to help someone who was being overlooked or ignored,
that was me—you failed to help me.”

Of course, that is the job of this church, and we are always trying to broaden the
circle of your concern and expose you to you to people and places that will deliver
you from slothfulness.

If you are an active participant in the ministries of this church,
you cannot become a sloth.

If you faithfully support this church with your prayers, presence,
gifts and service, you will be actively involved in improving the world.

Our commitment to Missions is a hallmark of this congregation.

That is why we invite you to work with homeless families, go on Mission trips,
volunteer at the Action Center or Senior Resource Center, Family Tree.
Just by giving money you are helping people all over the world, people you will
never meet. Some of those very people are disaster victims all over the world.

On the 4th Sunday in Lent we celebrate One Great Hour of Sharing,
our major effort to raise money for our United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Many of you know all about UMCOR, but for those of you who don't,
it's primary focus is to bring relief wherever and whenever disaster strikes.

Whether that aid is medicine, food, clothes, shelter, or compassion,
UMCOR makes sure that disaster survivors are able to rebuild their lives.

(Show power point presentation about UMCOR)

It is very exciting that we have opportunities like this to put our faith in action,
to be faithful to God while we improve the lives of our sisters and brothers around
the world. And helping them really helps us.

It feels wonderful to know you are making a positive difference in this world.

The stress free life of a sloth will always have a certain appeal.

Doing nothing but eating and sleeping, being a complete bum,
bohemian, hippie, couch potato and freeloader is terribly tempting.

But that is a living death for those who are called to follow Jesus Christ.

That is not the abundant life to which God calls us.

May God deliver us from slothfulness, and teach us to care, just as God cares.

Thanks Be To God.