

“The Seven Deadly Sins: Gula (Gluttony)”

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

8 July 2007

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Prayer.

Oh, please.

Our culture is obsessed
with wealth and consumption.
The media is filled with rags to riches
testimonials
as if the purpose of life
was the pursuit of wealth.
If we were all wealthy,
there would be no limit upon
what we could do,
what we could buy,
or where we could go.
It is as if money and consumption
was the solution
to every one of our problems.

Our family enjoyed Will Smith’s movie,
“The Pursuit of Happyness”
(yes, it is spelled with a “y”)
this past week.
It is a moving story of a single father
raising his son
in a San Francisco homeless shelter
while he apprenticed
as a stock broker for Dean Witter.
It is a great story of how
one man overcomes
every obstacle life throws his way.
What moved me was his endearing
dedication and love for his son,
not the fact that he became

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a multi-gazillionaire by the end of the movie.
 Though I'm sure most audiences applauded his ultimate financial triumph, most probably missed the value of the journey: how nothing could separate him from his son, the value of holding his son while swaying to gospel hymns, or the closeness brought by a son nesting in under the arm, sleeping by your side.

If we are told enough times that money and consumption is the solution to all our troubles, eventually we will start to believe that it is true.

We should know better.

The world is filled with Lottery winners who file for bankruptcy, with crack addicts who blow their life savings and retirement funds, with celebrities in and out of jail, rehab, or their psychiatrist's office.

Do not buy what "Entertainment Tonight" is trying to sell.
 There is no revolution in SUVs, so don't be taken in by their advertisements.
 Thicker eyelashes or carrying the latest designer bag isn't going to make a difference in your love life.
 As much as I love gadgets and technology,

the iPhone isn't going to save your marriage by giving you more time with your loved ones.

What the scriptures tell us, and what Jesus affirms, is that ***God provides sufficiently for our every need, God grants us stewardship over what has been provided, and that God has given us free will in how we exercise that stewardship.***

In the end, we are nothing more than stewards of what God has entrusted to us for a time, because it ultimately returns to our God who first gave it.

What matters in the faithful life is not how much you've accumulated rather, what have you done with what God has provided.

It is easy for someone with a full belly to say that God provides sufficiently, all-the-while starvation continues to plague our planet.

Yet, I firmly believe that this is true. What starves women and children is local corruption, governmental exploitation, revolutionary pride, and the ignorance of ethnic or religious discrimination.

What starves families is fanaticism gone astray.

What starves people is purchasing too many rifles and not enough rice, too many bombs and not enough bread, too many gun-ships and not enough

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fruits and vegetables.

Gluttony is the overindulgence in any one thing.

In Pope Gregory's time,
gluttony was defined as thoughtless excess,
though today,
we largely think
of gluttony as too much food and drink.
Whether it is too many calories a day
too much power,
too many weapons,
too big of a bank account,
too much square footage for a house,
too many toys in the yard,
too many trips to the buffet,
or too many trips to the water-park:
gluttony, defined as the second of the
seven deadly sins,
is simply the overindulgence of any one
thing.

In his letter to the church in Galatia,
the apostle Paul identifies gluttony
with the following words:
"drunkenness, carousing, and things like
these."

In contrast, he offers self-control
as a remedy for these sins.
Temperate discipline
stops gluttony dead in its tracks,
and, as I'm sure you know,
is far easier to preach than it is to practice.

Over the past two weeks
I've been doing a lot of painting
(along with Nicholas, my son,
and my brother, Steve)
down at the cottage.
Painting is a frustrating,
yet, contemplative sport;
allow one to do a lot of thinking

while aerobically applying
pigmented glop
(that spreads like a virus
from hands to hair to feet).
My thoughts have not been focused on
the specifics of our overindulgence
- after all, aren't we all aware of
what tempts our gluttony? -
in as much as they have been focused
upon
why overindulgence is considered a sin;
sin being
that which separates us from God.
I've systematically identified four
reasons for you to consider
why gluttony is such a hideous sin.

First, gluttony steals the focus from God.
Is not our primary purpose in life
to return to God our praise and thanks?
to glorify God with our prayers and
worship?
Is it not our purpose
to place God in the center of our lives,
to replace the self
with Jesus Christ,
his teaching, his example,
his redemption, and his salvation?
Gluttony steals the focus from God,
blinds us to the truth
that God is the master and commander of
creation;
tempts us to focus our thoughts and efforts
on earthly affairs.

Secondly, gluttony describes misplaced
trust.
We become self-centered,
not God-centered.
We place our trust
in our own skills and abilities,
in our own craft and cunning,

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in our own accumulations and resources.
 Our trust in God
 is replaced with our trust in
 what is in the refrigerator and cookie jar.
 I am currently reading Walter Bruggeman's
 epic for our time
 "Theology of the Old Testament"
 and I am reminded of Israel's cyclical trust.
 In times of abundance and overindulgence
 faith weakened,
 people partied,
 destruction loomed,
 and despite being God's chosen people,
 destruction brought exile and lament.
 Faith is built in times of want,
 in times of pain and suffering.
 It was by the waters of Babylon
 when the children of Israel wept bitterly
 that they returned God to the center of
 their lives,
 returned Yahweh to the center of their
 faith,
 and experienced the return of their status
 as God's blessed and chosen people.

Thirdly, gluttony steals resources
 from those who are in more need than the
 self.
 My eating a 3,000 calorie lunch
 deprives someone on this planet from
 having sufficient daily bread today.
 "How does my over consumption
 take food out of the mouth of a child
 in sub-Sahara Africa?" you ask.
 The economics have already been
 weighted to nations of affluence.
 More peanut butter and jelly has
 already been shipped to the shelves of
 Wegman's
 than is being sent by container ship to
 Zimbabwe.
 The captains of industry,

based on previous experience,
 already anticipate our gluttony.
 How else can one explain the endless
 supply of beer at the convenience store
 gasoline at the gas pumps
 or electricity wired directly to our homes?
 Our microscopic perception of endless
 supply
 leads us to the depletion of natural
 resources
 the exhaustion of gas and oil reserves
 and the eventual future environmental
 collapse
 of our planet.
 Our over consumption does make a
 difference.
 It does take food away from hungry
 mouths.
 We are just too myopic to see
 the effects of our actions.

And finally, appealing to the sweet spot
 of our scripture lesson for this morning:
 the glutinousness over consumption in our
 lives
 makes us prisoners to the flesh,
 not participants with the Spirit.
 The flesh is temporal;
 which is to say,
 temporary.
 But the Spirit is eternal.
 A thousand years is but a moment
 to the creator of the universe,
 but to us, it represents more than twenty
 generations
 of the temporal flesh.
 Will one person's gluttony make a
 difference
 in the trajectory of human kind?
 It certainly will not improve the human
 condition.
 The best possible outcome would be

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that it would have no effect,
it would maintain the status quo.
But, in the majority of circumstances,
one person's over consumption
- one person's slavery to the flesh -
becomes a detriment to the rest of the
world.

Consider the alternative, for a moment,
that is, making oneself a participant with
the Spirit,

a dancer with the Lord of the Dance.

***Placing one's trust in God
through faithful living,
intentional stewardship,
and hospitable evangelism,
has the potential
to change the course
of human events on a global scale;
and not just for a one time effect,
but one that could ripple for millennia.***

Invite one person into a relationship with
Jesus Christ,

and that person might become the next
Billy Graham

and not the next Saddam Hussein.

Disciplined self-control can empower the
Spirit.

It can be a passive collaborator, guide and
friend,

or it can be an active initiator for the Spirit
to affect the lives of others.

In the end,
a life of gluttony,
of unrestricted excess,
is a life that is lost,
a life that is empty,
a life that has failed.

Over indulgence blinds us to the truth.

It turns us inward.

It makes us slaves to our own insatiable
desires.

Gluttony reflects an inner desperation
- a losing, hopeless desperation -
to wrestle control of our lives away
from God
and to make ourselves the idolatrous
center.

Gluttony is a battle I'm waging all the time;
and I suspect that it is a battle
most of the rest of you are waging, too.

If it isn't food,

it probably is an excess in something else.

Join with me,

beloved members and friends of Zion,
in an effort to lead a more disciplined life,
a more temperate life,

with Jesus Christ as our center.

In the end,

isn't this all that matters?

Amen.

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