

“Deadly Sins: Lust”

Date: March 13, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Deadly sins series

Theme: Lust

Texts: Matthew 5:27-30; John 4:5-18

Today we consider the sixth of seven deadly sins. So far we've looked at pride, envy, anger, sloth and greed.

Of all the deadly sins, lust may be the most difficult to talk about. Even though people think we're sexually liberated, talking about sexuality can be difficult. It's a very personal and private part of our lives. But we must talk about it, because Jesus did.

Our second gospel lesson this morning recalls an encounter Jesus had with a woman at a well, a Samaritan woman. There was racial prejudice even in Jesus' time and so it was unusual for a Jew to be speaking to a Samaritan.

It was also unusual for a man to be talking to a woman in public like this. But Jesus was all about breaking down social barriers and connecting with people. He asks her for a drink. And the conversation turns to her personal life. Jesus liked to cut to the chase.

You see, this woman was drawing water at noon – the middle of the day. Most of the town women came in the early morning, when it was cool. Why was she here at this time of day? Jesus knew her heart. This woman had been leading a promiscuous life.

She had been through five husbands and was now living with another man who was not her husband. She had come to draw water from the well at noon-time so she would not be confronted by the other ladies of town. She was an outcast; she was scorned.

Who knew her history, how she had come to this place in her life? Did the people take the time to listen to her story, to know her heart? Jesus did. Jesus used the analogy of water to speak to her about that deep thirst inside her soul.

You see, thirst is an appropriate symbol for lust. Those who thirst for sexual pleasure are seldom satisfied. Often-times, people who are thirsting for a deep and satisfying relationship, with love and intimacy, are instead chasing after sexual images in pornography, or in affairs – believing that love is just around the corner.

Here was a woman who attempted to satisfy herself with half a dozen relationships and she found each of them unfulfilling. Jesus was different – He offered her living water, a satisfying relationship with God, so that she would never thirst again.

We live in a society that is spiritually thirsty, and people are turning to the wrong things to satisfy their thirst. We are a society that is obsessed with sex. Sexual images are used in advertising to sell anything from cars to beer to restaurants. Please, don't tell me that Hooters has anything to do with owls.

Sexual images saturate the media – on the Internet, on television, in magazines; it's everywhere. The swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* is its biggest selling issue of the year. It sells, not because of any story that's inside about football or basketball.

Pornography is a billion dollar a year industry and continues to grow. Its availability online makes it easily accessible to young people, who are looking at porn at an ever-younger age. Pornography is not a victimless activity that hurts no one. It humiliates and degrades women and children. And, it can become addictive.

Lust is deadly. People everywhere pay a terrible price for lust. Lust is the parent of thousands of unplanned babies and thousands of abortions. Lust is the hammer that breaks people's hearts. A boy tells a girl, "If you love me, let's do it."

He may use her and then forget her, and her heart is broken. In today's world, it's not only the boys who are seducing the other sex; girls can be just as sexually aggressive. But is it love?

Lust does away with people having feelings and hopes and dreams. Lust sees people as only so many body parts, or just a thing to use and throw away. People become objects or play toys. People use each other for their pleasure, but there is no commitment, no satisfying relationship, and no real intimacy.

Now let it be said, the Bible is not against human sexuality. When Adam saw Eve he excitedly proclaimed, "This at last is flesh of my flesh." The passion and the pleasure of sex is a fact of life; it is a God-given gift and blessed by God.

Remember, the Bible includes the Song of Solomon, a love letter depicting the passionate love between a man and a woman. In the Bible, human sexuality is not dirty, shameful or lewd. It is a gift from God.

Lust, however, takes this natural and God-given attraction, and twists it into something unholy. The Bible isn't anti-sex. What the Bible opposes is the attraction that simply wants to use another person for their own gratification. It's taking something holy and using it for unholy purposes. Let's look at the difference between lust and love.

Lust simply wants to take and possess. Love seeks to give and to share with another. Lust seeks to dominate, while love seeks intimacy and partnership. Lust simply uses another person; love seeks to enhance the other. Lust treats the other person as an object, a thing to be used. Love involves commitment and a steadfast love.

The actions of lust are directly opposite the actions of love. Anyone who pays attention to the dark shadows of their heart knows the distinction and can readily name it. We instinctively know the difference between a lustful look and a loving look.

Jesus tells us that the sin of lust is not only what you do with your eyes or your hands; lust is first of all an attitude of the heart. Jesus tells his disciples they must learn to discipline their minds and their hearts. We need to change the way we think about people, which will change the way we look at people.

Some guys will justify staring at an attractive woman saying, "It doesn't hurt to look at the menu." But you know what? If you look long enough, you want to order from the menu. We need to discipline our hearts and then our eyes.

Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better to lose one member of your body than for your whole body to be defiled."

All scholars agree, Jesus is exaggerating to make a point. He is not asking us to mutilate ourselves. In fact, the eye or the hand is not the problem. The problem is in our thoughts and our desires. The problem is in our hearts.

Jesus is giving us an example using a graphic illustration. What does that have to do with us today? Well, instead of plucking out your

eye, or cutting off your hand, what if we choose to turn off the channel when something sexually suggestive comes on the TV? What if we consciously turn our eyes away, when we find ourselves staring too long at a person or image?

Don't cut off your hand; cut off the source of your temptation. Remove the source of your temptation whenever you can. Choose not to watch graphic movies. Choose not to go to porn sites. Choose not watch the Victoria Secret commercials when they come on.

If you're tempted by a certain person at work, choose not to be around them as much as possible. Spend more time at home with your wife or husband. Choose not to go on that business trip with that person. Don't put yourself in situations that will compromise your integrity. Cut off the source of your temptation.

Lust prefers the fantasy. Some have said that lust is an affair of the mind. Well, get real. That gorgeous-looking boy or girl, man or woman, who you've been fantasizing about - well, they're not perfect. They've got faults too. We might think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, but if you knew the real person, you'd find they have faults too. Lust lives in fantasy; love lives in the real world.

For too long the Church has been quiet on issues of sexuality, for fear that we might offend some people. But we need to tell people God's plan. The United Methodist Church has this to say about sex – "Fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness."

That means God desires that we wait till marriage for sex, and once married you don't have sex with anyone besides your mate. It's God's plan for us. Anything else and we're settling for second best.

We don't just hurt God when we break His commandments; we hurt ourselves. Lust is deadly.

Remember that woman at the well? It's important to note that Jesus never condemned her. Instead he offered her a new way of living. He called her to drink living water – to repent and confess and live a new way of life. She did, and she turned around.

Lust is powerful. It can destroy marriages; it can ruin lives. But with God's help we can surrender our desires and find our fulfillment in God. Lust tries to satisfy that spiritual thirst with sexual pleasure. But only the living water of a relationship with God can truly satisfy.

The woman at the well, once thirsty and not satisfied, can now say, "Come, see the one who quenched my thirst." May it be so in each of our lives. Amen? Amen!