

“Deadly Sins: Gluttony”

Date: March 20, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Theme: Gluttony, weight, grace

Occasion: Deadly Sins, series

Today is the final sermon in the series we call The Seven Deadly Sins. So far we've looked at (can you name them?): Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, and Lust. Today we consider gluttony.

The early church had a custom; it was a feast called the Agape or Love Feast. Christians would gather in someone's home, bringing what food they could. The various foods were shared and they all sat down to a common meal, much like our modern-day tureen dinner.

In the church at Corinth, things had gone sadly wrong with the practice of their Love Feast. In this church there were rich and poor. There were those who could bring plenty of food and there slaves who could bring hardly anything. In fact, for many a poor slave, the Love Feast may have been the only decent meal of the whole week.

In Corinth, the art of sharing was lost. The rich Christians did not share their food, but ate in exclusive groups by themselves, hurrying through their meal in case they had to share. The poor had next to nothing to eat.

The result was that the stark differences between the haves and the have-nots were highlighted. It should have been the other way around – everyone should have had plenty to eat, regardless of what the person was able to bring. All are equal at the Table of the Lord. But the rich and the greedy kept the best food to themselves and left the poor to fend for themselves. Paul strongly and rightly denounced this practice.

It is in this context that we frame our conversation about the last of the seven deadly sins, gluttony. Eating food, of course, is a necessity of life. We need food to live, to give our bodies strength to go about doing the tasks of daily living. We even need food to be sociable, likable people. Food is not just protein, vitamins and minerals; eating food is a way of life. Anybody here like to eat out?

In the novel *Zorba the Greek*, Alexis Zorba tells his young friend, the boss: “Tell me what you do with the food you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are. Some turn their food into fat and manure, some into work and good humor, and others, I’m told, into God.”

Food: “tell me what you do with the food you eat” – that’s an important insight. Food occupies a major portion of our lives. We spend time buying food, preparing our food, eating and cleaning up, not to mention the snacks we eat and the meals we eat out of home. Food is a major part of our lives, and it’s a major preoccupation too.

It should come as no surprise that a majority of people report having issues with food. The rate of obesity continues to climb in our country, not just among adults but now affecting our children as well. A significant number of people report being on a diet, recovering from a diet, or thinking they should go on a diet. We think about food a lot.

But the sin of gluttony is not about good or bad eating habits. Gluttony is not about over-eating or even about being overweight, though these could be symptoms. Instead, I would suggest that gluttony is thinking about food and dealing with food to the extent that it pushes other more important matters in our life aside.

Another way to put this: Not all of us who are overweight are necessarily gluttons. A painfully thin, anorexic girl who engages in

cycles of self-starvation and binge-eating followed by purging has her whole life dominated by food. Such a life is one of gluttony.

The sin of gluttony is making food into a god. Food is allowed to define who we are. Food is looked upon as a way to solve or relieve the burden of our problems. It's using food for the wrong purpose – to medicate feelings rather than simply provide our body nourishment.

For many people, they're not addicted to alcohol or drugs, but they may be addicted to food. Whenever they find themselves in pain, in a crisis, feeling sad or lonely or depressed, they reach for food. Food becomes our medication for feelings we're uncomfortable with, and then it becomes our god. We turn to food instead of to God.

Maxie Dunnan writes in his workbook on the Seven Deadly sins, that many of us no longer eat to live. We live to eat. We over-indulge. If a little is good, more is better. Super-size it.

Restaurants now cater to this – the portion of food served is often double what the average person needs for a healthy meal. We no longer eat to provide ourselves with the basic nutrition needed for life; we use food for entertainment.

But why are we over-indulging? The answers are complex. It's complicated why some people can eat all they want and not gain any weight, and why others can eat barely anything at all and still not lose any weight. It has to do with body metabolism; it has to do with body chemistry; it has to do with genetics.

This is a very sensitive and complex issue we're dealing with this morning. Many people are quite self-conscious about their appearance. They wish food did not have the power it does over their

lives. Please hear me, my sermon today is not meant to make people who already feel guilty or poorly about themselves feel even more self-conscious.

However, I would suggest that the underlying problem with both lust and gluttony, is trying to feed the needs of the soul with the things that satisfy the body. People are trying to fill the spiritual emptiness of their lives by feeding themselves with food, and with sex and with drugs and alcohol, and with shopping sprees to the mall.

Those things appeal to bodily pleasures, and they do bring temporary relief. But they do not bring ultimate satisfaction. Food or any of those other things will not bring you closer to God. Food is not the answer.

But hear this – fat will not condemn you in the eyes of God, nor will thin save you. What we weigh or what we look like is of no account in our relationship with God. We are saved by grace and not by any form of good works or performance. Your salvation is not dependent on you losing 20 pounds. We are not saved by dieting.

It is neither our good looks, nor our scrupulous dieting, that puts us right in the eyes of God. Food becomes an empty substitute for a living, loving relationship with God. Gluttony is trying to feed our God-connection with food for the body. It just won't work.

Gluttony is allowing food to be your god. The solution is allowing God to be God in your life, and turning to him with all of your emotional and psychological and physical needs. Know that God loves you, beyond your wildest dreams – just as you are. Skinny or overweight, God loves just as you are. Thanks be to God. Amen.