

“Sinners and Saints: Gluttony”

Exodus 35:4-10, 20-29 • Luke 12:13-21, 32-34

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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If there's one thing that almost all of us love to do it's eat. Of course eating is something we *need* to do in order to survive, but it's also something most of us enjoy. And for many of us our waists tell everyone how much we enjoy it. But if you're worried about those few extra pounds you've put on, here's some research that may put it into perspective. According to the US Department of Agriculture, the average American consumes just under 2,000 pounds of food each year. That's right. You eat almost a TON of food during the year. And that number seems to be increasing.

When I was in college, the servings in the cafeteria were not at all large by today's standards, which was just as well because the food wasn't very good anyway. Today, college cafeterias are all-you-can-eat buffets with unlimited pizza, pasta, and desserts. Even off campus there are places like Golden Corral that offer extensive buffets where you are encouraged to eat a lot. And then there are cruise ships! On board a cruise there is food available 24 hours a day, and the menu includes everything from pizza and burgers to steak and lobster. And of course, there's an all-you-can-eat buffet.

This morning we are continuing our series on the Seven Deadly Sins and their opposite life-giving virtues. Most important in this series, though, are the spiritual disciplines that help us get rid of the sinful patterns and desires in our lives and replace them with the virtues. Today we are talking about one that may hit a little close to home for many of us. We're talking about gluttony.

Gluttony is not a word that we hear much these days, probably because it's become so commonplace. Gluttony has become respectable. So the first thing we need to do is understand what gluttony is. The short answer is what you probably already have in mind – eating too much. Maybe the picture in your head is that feeling you get after Thanksgiving dinner when

you've eaten so much you can barely move. But if you only experience that once a year then it's not really gluttony for you.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, gluttony is defined as “excessive indulgence.” It comes from the Latin word that means, “to gulp.” Gluttony is over-indulgence in something. It's a lack of self-control when consuming. So overeating at Thanksgiving may not be good for your body, but not necessarily sinful. On the other hand, if you regularly eat to excess there may be a sin-problem there.

As we've learned about these so-called deadly sins, the real problem is not the action but the heart that worships something more than it worships God. As one author put it, “Gluttony worships food to feed our own self-love.” That was Adam and Eve's sin. Genesis 3 says that Eve “saw that the fruit was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit and she ate it.” They desired food more than they desired God and that led them to act.

Our reading from Numbers 11 tells the story of the Israelites in the wilderness after they have escaped from slavery in Egypt. Food and water was scarce but they prayed and God provided manna for them to eat. But they wanted more. That's what gluttony is. It's a desire for more. Verse 4 says they had a “strong craving.” And so they complain. Loudly. “Oh that we had meat to eat!” It was so much better in Egypt. There was that all-you-can-eat seafood buffet every day and it didn't cost us anything. Well, except our freedom. The thing about overindulging in physical things is that it ends up starving your soul. If you spend all your time thinking about what you're going to eat next, you don't spend any time thinking about the God who can provide that next meal.

One of the things Scripture teaches us about God is that if we keep desiring something more than we desire Him, eventually God will let us have what we want. And that's not a good

thing. After the people complain about not having meat to eat God gets angry and ends up giving them what they ask for. God tells Moses to say, “the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, *until it comes out of your nose* and you can’t stand it.” The end of chapter 11 describes how God sent quail that fell right in the camp. But when a large number of the Israelites died while eating the quail, they named the place, “graves of craving,” which can also be translated as “graves of gluttony.”

Traditionally the virtue that is opposite of gluttony is another word we don’t here much any more – temperance. It simply means moderation or self-restraint. Another way to say this would be self-control, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. As we heard earlier, Paul writes that the sinful works of the flesh include drunkenness and impurity. The word translated as impurity describes the life the Prodigal Son was living while spending all of his inheritance. In other words, gluttony. Also, most places in the Bible that mention gluttony link it to drunkenness. Both involve overindulging.

But then Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*.” He then tells us the reason self-control is included: “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” In other words, when we commit our life to following Jesus we commit to getting rid of those desires that distract us from Christ and his work in our lives.

The thing is, just as we’ve seen the past few weeks, we can’t have more of the virtue of self-control by trying harder. Willpower won’t cut it. Trying harder won’t produce results. For most of us, if we left here today and tried to run a marathon we couldn’t do it, no matter how hard we try. The only way to run a marathon is to train for it. It’s the same for our spiritual life. We need to train. The way we train for self-

control or moderation is by practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting.

The way this works is that you give up something for a short time and spend that time focusing on God, His Word, and His work in your life. So if food is what you find yourself overindulging in, then fasting might involve skipping lunch one day each week and spending that time studying the Bible passages that deal with trusting God to provide for your needs. It’s important that you not get a legalistic attitude about it. Fasting is not the goal. The goal is to trust God more. Fasting is just one tool to help train in godliness so that it becomes a habit that you don’t have to think about.

So lets spend a few minutes talking about how this might look in your life. As we’ve said, gluttony for you may in fact involve eating too much. But it could also be overindulging in alcohol. Or exercise. Think for a moment about what sorts of things you do compulsively without really thinking about it. What about watching TV? With Netflix and other streaming services you can literally watch your favorite show for hours, one episode after another. We call that ... *binge* watching. Here’s a little tip for you. You can probably consider anything that involves binging to be gluttony. For some people video games are a form of gluttony, spending hours playing. Some of you aren’t going to like this next one. Your phone. Raise your hand if you’ve noticed someone else staring at their phone for long periods of time, perhaps scrolling through Facebook or Instagram or Twitter or Pinterest. Those services are all designed so that you don’t notice how long you’re actually looking at them. You can scroll endlessly. And while you’re doing that you are not focused on the presence of Jesus in your life.

If you recognize any of these patterns in your own life then you will probably benefit by fasting from the activity (or in the case of television the inactivity). Try it just once a week. Instead of finishing off that bag of Oreos or staring at something with a screen, read your Bible. Get up and move around. Spend time in a

device-free face-to-face conversation with someone. Most of all, think about all the good things God provides and develop an appetite for more of those.

Amen.