

## “Gluttony or Moderation?”

August 30, 2015

*Sinning like a Christian: The Good News series*

*STORY of the DIME GAME at the county fair: put your dime on the color around the outside of the booth, throw the ball and hope the ball lands on your color. If it does, you win. If it doesn't, you're out a dime. But it's easy to keep playing! I lost \$6 because I couldn't stop. I wanted to keep going to see if next time I could win.*

There's a reason that I don't gamble. I think I could get caught up in it very quickly and lose control. I could keep going with that small chance that I'd win next time. It's important for me to recognize my tendency and know that I couldn't control myself.

We connect gluttony to food and over-indulgence. And that's certainly a part of it. Among these seven deadly sins, gluttony is probably easiest to see. We overeat. We struggle with weight. We spend billions on dieting each year - \$50 billion to be exact. If we look at body mass index in Muskegon County, roughly 1/3 of the population is overweight, 1/3 is considered obese, and 1/3 is within a healthy weight range. I offer these numbers not as an indictment, but as a reality check. I know where I stand in those numbers, and it's not where I should be or want to be.

Last week, we focused on greed. If greed is wanting more and never being satisfied, then gluttony might be best described as a misplaced hunger. It has to do with taking too much in, going overboard, indulging too often. I want to be clear that when we talk about this, we need to distinguish from eating disorders that plague so many in our world. Gluttony has to do with eating with no thought to God who is Giver of every good gift.

How many of us take time to invite God to be with us at the table: “Be present at our table, Lord, Be here and everywhere adored...” One writer says, “If you see each of these seven deadly sins as a tilt away from God, the questions about gluttony become ‘Are you eating with God?’ and ‘Where do you find your joy?’” he said.

Gluttony has to do with being preoccupied and always focused on matters of the flesh. Maybe you struggle with food and drink, but I'm convinced it can involve other things as well. For any of us, temptation to satisfy ourselves with too much is very real. To truly trust in God's help to “lead us not into temptation” is a struggle for us.

To talk about self-control and moderation forces us to talk about boundaries and limits. And many of us don't like to talk about limits. We want what we want when we want it. Gluttony can get us so focused on our needs that we don't see anything else.

Friends, it's not the eating that's bad. We need food and water. Meals were an important part of Jesus' life and ministry. He used the image of meals and banquets to talk about the Kingdom of God. The celebration of Holy Communion is a central part of our worship together.

Gluttony, though, is that misplaced hunger that pulls us away from what God intends. Will Willimon says that gluttony is when "the gut becomes more important than the soul." When the necessities of life like food become the threat. We focus on what we can gain for ourselves and forget what our decisions might do to others. We want to take care of ourselves instead of putting others first, or even more, seeking God's direction for our lives. We can quickly ignore the fact that our decisions don't honor God and God's gifts in our lives. Hear some words from Scripture that speak to how we treat our bodies:

Philippians 3:17-21: <sup>17</sup>Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

<sup>18</sup>For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is destruction, **their god is their stomach**, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

I Corinthians 6:19-20: <sup>19</sup> You surely know that **your body is a temple** where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you and is a gift from God. You are no longer your own.

<sup>20</sup>God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God.

We worry about our basic needs, but Jesus says not to worry about what we'll eat or drink. Worry and anxiety are so widespread that even the Internet has websites offering help to people who worry. One is called "The Worry Bank" at [www.worrybank.com](http://www.worrybank.com). It's not a joke – I looked it up.

Jesus' words about worry are tied to the passage that we read last week about serving two masters. Those who want to follow Jesus cannot serve both God and money, and included in that is property. Those who want to follow Jesus cannot value appearances, having more than enough, and consuming more than we need. We have to go beyond survival mode – thinking that there's not enough. And we have to step away from greed – the desire for more and more in order to keep up with everyone else - and gluttony - taking too much for ourselves.

Some of us struggle with keeping up with our bills for a house, a car, and other commitments. Those struggles are real. We're anxious, and we worry. And yet people around us and all over the world struggle for food, clean water, clothing, and shelter because of recent natural disasters that have destroyed everything or because they simply live in poverty. It's a challenge to really hear Jesus' words well.

Our preoccupation with food or drink or anything else takes the balance out of life and distracts us from work, relationships, and our spiritual life. Frederick Buechner says, "A glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition." Gluttony can mean that we're trying to satisfy a spiritual hunger with something physical. But hear this list of three "Things God Has Never Seen":

1. A person God doesn't love
2. A situation God can't help
3. A substitute for God's son Jesus Christ - sex, drugs, money, etc.

But he reminds that we're to act like people who follow him – the Son of God – God who created the universe and everything in it, God who knows us better than anyone else, God who provides for us. Jesus' question to those who want to follow him is this: do you trust God to care for you? And perhaps the added question would be: what is enough? What do you need?

Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear." Friends, keep in mind: these words were not spoken to people who had things all figured out; they were spoken to peasant farmers who lived at the mercy of the rains, to citizens of an occupied country at the mercy of the Romans, to rich and poor equally susceptible to disease. Jesus spoke to people in a similar situation.

Worry is related to a shortage of hope and trust. Someone even put it this way: worrying is the opposite of trusting. I heard a phrase once that has stuck with me: "If you pray, don't worry. And if you worry, don't pray."

Dr. Edward Hallowell was a psychologist who taught at Harvard for more than 20 years and a practicing Christian. His advice for people who worry a lot is this: "Talk to God when you feel worried.... Brain scans and EEG monitors show beneficial changes in the brain during meditation and prayer. The changes correlate with most of our measures of improved health, *including longevity* and reduced incidence of illness."

Truly, worry and anxiety cannot solve the problems we face. I'm somewhat of a worrywart, so Jesus' words are difficult for me. But Jesus wants us to remember that we witness to others in how we live – and that includes how we treat our needs and

wants. Whatever the situation, Jesus calls us to trust our God. That means we look at how we order our priorities to follow Jesus.

But at the heart of it is a question of loyalty and trust – of placing our trust in God who promises to provide what we need. It's not that what we have isn't part of our lives, but we can't base our lives on what we have. We can't be so focused on food or anything else that we forget God's abundance and grace. We have to understand that what we have is a gift from God that must be used in line with God's priorities.

Jesus knows our tendency to obsess about those things rather than focusing on what God calls us to do and to be. When we place our life in God's hands, we can live with the assurance that God is at work in our lives. Jesus isn't talking so much about the issue of worry here as he is the call to strive for the Kingdom of God – work for the Kingdom of God – as we live every day.

Seeking God first means that we realize God's care for us. Of course food, water, and clothing are important. They are the basics of life. Jesus isn't denying their importance, but rather asking us to consider in whom we trust to provide them for us. When we focus on God's love and care for us and live in response to it, then our personal needs will be met. We will have what we need – maybe not our wants – but our needs.

May God help us to live with balance and moderation.

Thanks be to God. Amen.