

We are in the midst of a sermon series called, *Why the Seven Deadly Sins are so Deadly*. So far we have talked about the problems with envy and greed. Today, we are talking about lust.

We don't do a good job talking about such things in the church. And I want to tell you I am a bit nervous about talking about this.

Once three couples approached a local church in hopes of joining the church. The pastor at the church said, to these couples, "It would be great to have you join the church. But before we can let you do that, we have a new rule. The new rule is that if you really want to join the church, you must go without marital relations for one month. At the end of the month we will admit you into membership in the church.

The three couples returned a month later to meet with the pastor. The first couple, an elderly couple said, "This was not easy. But we stayed out of each other's way, we kept busy and we slept in separate beds."

The pastor said, "Congratulations. Welcome to the church."

The second couple, a middle aged couple said, "Well, we found it pretty difficult too. But we worked, and gardened, and read all in different places at different times. We even slept in separate bedrooms. We generally stayed away from each other. But we did it."

The pastor said, "Congratulations. Welcome to the church."

The third couple, a young couple said, "Well, we started out just fine. We stayed away from each other and worked on different hobbies. Then one day we were getting some vegetables, and I grabbed a tomato and she grabbed a carrot, and our hands touched. We couldn't help it. We just couldn't control ourselves."

The pastor said, "Agh, that's a real shame. But I'm afraid that we can't let you into this church."

"We were afraid of that," said the young man. "They won't let us back into the grocery store either."

What a way to start this sermon on Lust.

I know, I can't believe I told that story either. If I have offended anyone, I am sorry. Please forgive me. We don't do a good job in the church

talking about things like lust or sex or power. Yet we live in a culture that has been obsessed with lust and sex and power. All you have to do is watch a few TV commercials and you begin to wonder what is being sold.

And this is a problem for us in the church, who represent Jesus Christ. Because we struggle with how to respond to this culture. Do we ignore it? Do we pretend that we are not swayed by this culture? Do we seek to overcome it? How can we respond well to our culture?

We need to face it and be honest about it. Our scripture for today gives us some clues as to how to deal with the real problem of lust. In this passage King David is being confronted by the prophet Nathan for something that he has done. Some of you might know the story.

For those of you who haven't, let me fill you in. You can read about this in Chapters 11 and 12 of 2nd Samuel. It starts off with David waking up from a nap and walking around on the roof of his palace. He spies a beautiful woman. He finds out who she is and discovers that she is married to Uriah the Hittite. Who just happens to be a soldier for King David, away fighting a battle for the King.

That doesn't bother David too much. He is the King after all. He calls Bathsheba to himself. He does the unthinkable. He brought her to his bedroom and had his way with her. Sometimes in the church, people have romanticized this by talking about how David and Bathsheba had a great love affair that was mutual. Most biblical scholars don't even mince words. They are pretty clear it wasn't a love affair. It was David simply taking what he wanted, without consent.

When the word comes that she is pregnant, the problem gets worse as David has Uriah killed in battle all in an attempt to cover up his mistake. And just when he thinks he has gotten away with it all, Nathan comes in and reminds him that God even sees what is happening in our lives behind closed doors.

This is a scripture that reminds us that when we let what is a healthy attraction toward others, turn and become an unhealthy lust, destruction occurs. In this case, the destruction was the end of lives, Uriah died. The baby born to Bathsheba and David dies. The marriage of Bathsheba and Uriah ends with his death.

In our lives, when lust from sex or lust for power takes control, there is destruction as well. I know of marriages that have ended because of addictions to pornography. I know of families that have suffered at the hands of the lust for power. All we have to do is remember the collapse of Enron to see the wake of destruction caused by the misuse of power. We could even look at the moral failures of our political leaders and I am not just talking about sexual issues in these failures, I am also talking about ignoring the justice issues of our day and how that causes destruction of life and of hope.

When we act as if we are at the center of the world and there is no one but us lives are hurt. When we act out of a sense of trying to fill the lusts and desires of our lives relationships around us begin to suffer. When we act as if life is only about me and meeting my needs, we act in a way that forgets our biblical faith.

Because in the eyes of God, the powerless are as valued as the powerful. The scriptural record is pretty clear, that the exploitation of the powerless ones is wrong and called evil. The achievements of power will mean nothing, if they are bought at the price of exploiting the weak and vulnerable of the world.

You and I have some choices to make. You see, it is not enough for us to simply stand and point our fingers at others to talk about how they fall short. But it is crucial for us to be honest with ourselves, with each other and with God, to see how we fall short. Are we standing up for the weak and vulnerable of our society? Or are we letting our lust for power, for success, for advancement, and yes, our lust for sex, cloud our vision of God?

We have choices to make. We can chose to live for ourselves (that is the choice of lust) or we can chose to live for God. What are you going to decide?

Parker Palmer tells a story about being a passenger on a plane that pulled away from the gate, it taxied to a remote corner of the field and stopped. The pilot came on the intercom and said, "I have some bad news and some really bad news. The bad news is there's a storm front in the West, Denver is socked in and shut down. We've looked for alternatives and there are none. So we'll be staying here for a few hours. That's the bad news. The really bad news is that we have no food and it's lunch time." Everybody groaned. Some passengers started to complain. Some became angry. But then, one of the flight attendants did a remarkable thing.

She stood up and took the intercom and said, "We're really sorry, folks. We didn't plan it this way and we really can't do much about it. And I know for some of you this is a big deal. Some of you are really hungry and were looking forward to a nice lunch. Some of you may have a medical condition and really need lunch. Some of you may not care one way or another and some of you need to skip lunch. So I'll tell you what we're going to do. I have a couple of breadbaskets up here and we're going to pass them around and I'm asking everybody to put something in the basket.

"Some of you brought a little snack along, just to tide you over in case something like this happened. Some of you have candy bars or peanut butter crackers. Others of you might have Rolands or a few lifesavers. And if you don't have anything edible, you have a picture of your children, or spouse, or significant other or even a business card. Everybody put something in and then we'll reverse the process. We'll pass the baskets around again and everybody can take out what he or she needs".

Well, what happened next was amazing. The griping stopped. People started to root around in pockets and handbags. Some even got up and opened their suitcases stored in the overhead luggage racks and got out boxes of candy, a stick of summer sausage, a bottle of wine. People started laughing, talking and sharing. This flight attendant transformed a group of people who were focused on need and deprivation and themselves, into a community of sharing and celebration. She had transformed scarcity into a kind of abundance.

I love that story. This flight attendant had a choice. She could live for herself and complain about how rotten she was going to be treated because of circumstances beyond her control. Or she could influence the people on the plane to live for more than themselves. She made her choice. So did the members of the plane. What about you?

Are you going to choose lust? Or are you going to choose more?

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen