

Gluttony and Temperance
Exodus 16:2 – 5, 13 – 30; Mark 7:14 – 23
Sunday, April 7, 2019

Some of you know that a little over a month ago, Jen and I started this 30-day cleanse, where we would drink a high-protein shake for breakfast, another one for lunch, have a protein bar for a mid-afternoon snack, and then eat about a 500-600 calorie dinner. Over the course of the four weeks that we did that, there were also four *fast days*. Once a week, we would drink four ounces of this nasty powder mix that was supposed to taste like fruit punch, but it did *not*. We would drink one of those for breakfast, one for lunch, one mid-afternoon, and another for dinner. No shakes like the other days, and no food. I could eat a *quarter of an apple* for a mid-morning snack and then two of these little chocolate squares for a mid-afternoon snack to keep my blood sugar up. We were supposed to do that once a week.

But when we started the program, a friend of Jen's who had done this before told us that if you do two of these fast days back-to-back, you see much better results. So we gave it a try. For two days, we ate nothing but those nasty powder drinks and about half of an apple. By the end of those two days, we were *so hungry*, because we went from eating normally to eating *nothing*. When we finally ate dinner, nothing had ever tasted so good!

Now, we *loved* the results that we saw through all of this. In fact we kept going with it even after the 30 days were over. But what it did was make me very mindful about just how much *food* is a part of my life. It made me conscious of just how much I *eat* in the course of a day, and especially how much I *snack*. I mean, I work in a *church* – there is *always* food around. On Wednesdays, I would smell Betsy Miller preparing dinner for Supper at St. John's *all afternoon* down in the kitchen. It was like torture. Or I would go down to see the ladies sewing pillow cases for Ryan's Case for Smiles down in the Fellowship Hall, and there would be a huge cake

sitting there, and at least three different people would offer me a slice. Or I would take some candy from the jar on Lara's desk. Or I would come home at the end of the day, and it would be nothing to have a snack before dinner was ready.

Those 30 days made me realize how *mindlessly* I ate. It made me focus on my eating habits and become much more *intentional* about them. And it was really *hard* at first. Because, in all honesty, *I love food*. And I *really* love the food that's not the best for me. Donuts, pizza, burgers, Chinese food, Mexican food, those little pretzels filled with peanut butter, anything that Reese's makes, and this is the time of the year when all the Easter candy is out, so the stores have those peanut butter *eggs* and sour Starburst jellybeans, which are my *favorite*. There's just *so much* delicious food out there, and I *enjoy* it. I like to eat it.

And you know what, I don't think that's a *sin*. There is nothing wrong with enjoying delicious food. What Betsy Miller does down there in that kitchen, there is nothing sinful about that. That is a gift from God. Which is why *this* sermon today is so difficult for me. More difficult than the one on lust a few weeks ago. Because today we are talking about *gluttony* as one of the Seven Deadly Sins. And most of us understand gluttony as "eating too much." If that's the case and eating too much is a sin, ya'll aren't going to see me in heaven. I'll just put that out there right now so you're not surprised. You'll get to heaven and be like, "Where's Patrick? Oh, it was the Reese's eggs."

So maybe I'm just trying to justify my own behavior, but I did a *lot* of research into gluttony this week. And here's what I found. Gluttony is not just about eating too much. Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas came up with a list of five ways to commit gluttony. Eating too much was one of them. But so was eating too *expensively*, eating too *eagerly*, eating too *daintily*

(I'm not sure what *that's* about), and eating too *soon*. Of those five, Aquinas said that eating too *eagerly* was the most serious form of gluttony, since it reflects “extreme attachment to the pleasure of mere eating, which can make the committer eat impulsively; absolutely and without qualification live merely to eat and drink; lose attachment to health-related, social, intellectual, and spiritual pleasures; and lose proper judgment.”¹

Pope Gregory, who formalized this list of Seven Deadly Sins, also outlined five ways gluttony could be committed: eating before the time of meals in order to satisfy the palate; seeking delicacies and better quality of food to gratify the “vile sense of taste”; seeking to stimulate the palate with overly or elaborately prepared food (like with luxurious sauces and seasonings); exceeding the necessary quantity of food; and taking food with too much eagerness, even when eating the proper amount, and even if the food is not luxurious.² Like Thomas Aquinas, Pope Gregory said that eating with too much eagerness is the worst, because it shows attachment to pleasure most clearly. You're eating simply for your own pleasure.

So it's not just eating too *much*. There are all these other understandings of gluttony. But I found three things in particular that really helped me understand this better. First is that gluttony is the overindulgence and overconsumption of anything *to the point of waste*. Second is that gluttony has to do with the excessive desire for food that causes it to be withheld from the needy. And third is that gluttony places concern with one's own impulses or interests above the well-being or interests of others. If you put all of those together, gluttony can be understood as wasteful eating that deprives the needy and places our own satisfaction above the well-being of others. And we see that very thing in this story from Exodus.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gluttony>

The people of Israel have been set free from slavery in Egypt where, even though they were *slaves*, they had plenty of food. Now they're out in the wilderness, and they have nothing. So they complain, and God says, "I will give you meat in the evening, and I will rain down bread from heaven in the morning, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. Don't take *more* than you need. Just enough for that day. On the sixth day, you should gather *twice* as much, two days worth, so that you can take the seventh day off."

So the people get up in the morning and find that God has indeed provided them with bread. Moses tells them, "Gather as much as you need for today," and he tells them exactly how much to take. But some of the people gathered *more*, which left others with *less*. But, it says, when they got back, those who gathered *more* had nothing over, and those who gathered less somehow had as much as they needed. God evened it all out. Some people didn't eat all of theirs. They kept it for the next day, because they didn't know if God was going to provide *more* bread. And the next morning, they found that what they had kept had gone bad.

But the idea here is that, while God had provided enough for everyone, some people took *more* than they needed, which left others with *less* than they needed. They were more concerned with their own well-being than they were with the well-being of others. They had to learn over the course of the 40 years that they spent in the wilderness to trust God to provide for their needs and eat in ways that ensure everyone has enough.

God has provided enough for all of us to have what we need each day. But some of us take *more* or waste what we have, leaving others with less. That is the sin of gluttony, and it is a sin that is *rampant* in western culture. From grocery stores to our pantries at home and portion sizes at restaurants, many of us *have* way more than we *need*.

I saw a segment on the *Today Show* the other week about a man named Cameron Macleish who has a cooking show online. What makes his cooking show different is that he only uses ingredients that he finds in the dumpsters of restaurants and grocery stores. And you would not *believe* the things he finds. Perfectly good oranges and peppers and heads of lettuce, all kinds of fruits and vegetables and even packaged meat that restaurants and stores just throw out at the end of the day for no good reason. He makes gourmet meals with them in an attempt to draw attention to just how much perfectly good food we *waste* every single day, while people around the world starve to death.

We have to learn to live and eat in ways that trust God's ability to provide for our needs – to give us this day our daily bread – ensuring that everyone has enough. The way that we *do* that is by practicing the virtue of *temperance*. That word *temperance* comes from a Latin word that means “self-control” or “to regulate.” The dictionary defines it as “moderation or voluntary self-restraint.” And I will be the first to say that self-control and restraint is *hard* when it comes to delicious food. But one of the things that surprised me about those 30 days was just how little I actually *needed* to eat each day. I didn't *need* that extra serving. I didn't *need* those snacks that were lying around. Temperance is a question of *how much do we need?*

And again, we're not saying that *eating* or *enjoying food* is a *sin*. What we're talking about is *wasteful* eating that deprives the needy and places our own satisfaction above the well-being of others. Taking more than we need at the expense of those who do not have enough. It's not that we can't eat or enjoy food. Just that when we do so, we must consider and provide for those who are hungry.

Jesus says that it's not what goes *in* to a person that defiles, but the things that come *out* of a person. He says "for it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All of these evil things come from within a person, and they defile a person." It's not what we *eat* that is sinful, but what comes forth from our *hearts*; the *condition* in which we eat. Are we eating – or consuming *anything*, not just food; this is about *anything* we consume – in such a way that considers the well-being of our neighbor? Or are we doing it simply for our own satisfaction and pleasure? Are we consuming from a place of self-indulgence or concern for those in need?

I remember growing up, having dinner at my grandparents' house every Sunday night. We would have these *amazing* homecooked meals, but every week before we ate, my grandfather would pray. It was always the same prayer, "Bless this food to the needs of our bodies and us to thy service, and keep us ever-mindful of the needs of others." We began every meal with an awareness of the needs of others and that this food was supposed to strengthen us to go out and *provide* for those needs.

This meal that we are about to share is meant to be approached the exact same way. It is meant to strengthen us – body and spirit – to go out and provide for the needs of others. We eat *this* meal, not for our own satisfaction or fulfillment, but out of love for God and our neighbor. The question becomes, how can *all* of our meals do that? Can we approach everything we eat in a way that draws our attention to those in need and equips us to *provide* for their needs?

This meal is not a lot, but it's *enough*. How can we practice temperance and self-control in such a way that we trust God provides us with enough in every aspect of our life, everything we consume, so that everyone has as much as they need?