

The Seven Deadly Sins
Gluttony - Still Hungry in Hell"
Luke 16:19-31

[Jesus taught his disciples:] ¹⁹"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

²⁴And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

²⁷And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house -- ²⁸for I have five brothers -- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Of the 7 deadly sins, there is only 1 of which Jesus is accused. In Luke 7, Jesus asked, “What are the people of this generation like?” Then he answers his own question, “They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ When John the Baptist came eating no bread and drinking no wine, you said, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Lk. 7:31-34). Then in Luke’s narrative immediately after he makes this statement, a Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for a meal. While they were reclining at table eating, a city prostitute came and poured expensive oil on Jesus’ feet – she wet his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. It’s a powerful, socially inappropriate, and uncomfortably intimate (uncomfortable for everyone except Jesus) So, undoubtedly those who accused him of gluttony would now also accuse him of lust.

The 5th Deadly Sin that we are considering today is gluttony. And we think of it much as the rich man is portrayed in Jesus’ parable, our text this morning.

This rich man spent all day luxuriating in the best clothes money could buy, and every day he was surrounded by a sumptuous feast of food, the aroma of which would float out the open windows out into the neighborhood tantalizing and torturing all who could smell it. It’s like one of the best aromas of summer... the intoxicating smell of someone in the neighborhood grilling. We usually picture this rich man, glutted with excess – corpulence... or a fit and well-groomed self-indulgence... all the food and delicacies arranged around him so that all his desires are within reach... or the closet meticulously arranged, shoes neatly in a row just where we want them.

Gluttony is one of the few sins about which saints and sinners alike seem to find common ground, at least at first blush. We have declared obesity a national crisis, and not without reason. You may remember that the First Lady Michelle O’Bama led a charge to reverse the trend of obesity among children. The center for disease control in the US reports that about 1/3 of adults and around 20% of children are obese.

Think of all the food shows that have a cult like following: Iron Chef, Chopped, Diners Drive-ins & Dives, Top Chef, The Great British Bake Off, The Bear... Even kids get in on food with shows like Michelle Obamas’ Waffles & Moochie food education show on Netflix, and films like Ratatouille ... we spend a lot of time thinking about food as a form of entertainment.

Many of us spend a lot of time thinking about food, health, and the environment – that’s a good thing. Some of us take pride in buying local or organic... or frequenting farm to table restaurants. Some of us are morally outraged at factory farming, and we turn up our noses at fast food. Certainly we as Christians find common cause with our non-Christian friends in taking food seriously as part of creational stewardship.

But, food is more than just a basic necessity. It’s at the very heart of culture and civilization – it’s at the heart of how we live our lives. Food is not only what we need to survive, but food is also a powerful influence on the shape and focus of our lives. For those of you who have grown up in American culture, think for the moment about food and time – our perceived need to eat quickly to get on to more important things speaks

volumes about how we order our lives, what we're willing to sacrifice in order to gratify our priorities.

When we look at our text, food... or gluttony... has become such a dominating part of the rich man's life – he is indifferent to justice (to the needs of those at his very gate). Worse yet, he's so occupied with his body and his physical gratification that he has lost his appetite for God and heaven. Anything in our lives that has that kind of power... power to make us indifferent to our neighbors and indifferent to our souls... is not to be taken lightly. Our ability to take what is a common good and a basic human necessity and abuse it to the point that it becomes life-killing lust and soul-killing idolatry demonstrates why gluttony has made this ignoble list of deadly sins.

So, let's consider 3 questions this morning:

1. Why does food matter to God? Now, of course food is not the only example of gluttony. Food is probably the 1st thing that comes to mind when we hear the word "glutton." So, we'll use food as the obvious example of gluttony which finds many other expressions in our lives. Why does food matter to God?
2. What is gluttony?
3. How can we eat in such a way that we are spiritually satisfied? In such a way that we are content with God and the bread from heaven.

1. Why does food matter to God?

If you know anything about the redemptive story of biblical history, you know that what we know as church dinners have a great precedent. Food has always been an important and visible part of the life of God's people.

a. Food is connected to God's joy in creation

Creation in all of its glory and splendor is a gift from God to his image bearers. The unspoiled Garden was a place of magnificent grandeur and beauty... flowing rivers, precious metals there to be plucked like fruit, and trees... fruit trees beautiful to look at, delicious to taste. As Jesus will later say of the Eucharist, the Creator says, Take, eat, delight, enjoy, live, flourish. The Giver of every good and perfect gift bestows the glory of his image on these his creatures, made a little lower than himself, and he surrounds them with his joyful benevolence. So great is his joy in what he has made, even still we can say, "taste and know that the Lord is good."

Why does food matter to God?

b. Food is connected to our obedience, our love for and our loyalty to God.

The serpent, Satan, said to our first parents: Did God really say that you shouldn't eat of this tree... this lovely, beautiful tree? Don't you know that if you eat the fruit of this tree you will be like him.

So... they took... they ate... their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked, and they were ashamed to be in God's presence, and they were ashamed to be in each other's presence.

All because of food.

In a very practical way the Creator said to his image bearers, Here is how I know you trust me, love me, and are loyal to me – you'll control how you eat. What you put in your mouth reveals what is in your heart.

So, when you and I take and eat, there is behind the goodness of the food, the bitterness of how food was the means by which such great sorrow has been unleashed on the world.

Even today, food is tied to worship... the food of every day living, and the sacramental food of Passover before Christ, and the Eucharist after Christ's resurrection.

Why does food matter to God?

c. Food is connected to God's grace and mercy.

In the rhythms of OT worship, under the Mosaic law, God's people were expected to devote a tenth of their grain, wine, and oil to the Lord each year by eating it in his presence at the tabernacle (Dt. 14:22–23). Feasting was a demonstration that all was well with all who sat at table, with God as the great host.

As you read the story of worship in the OT, you realize how much God decreed that worship should engage all our senses – the taste of great food, rich wine, the dazzling array of colors and metals, the texture of wood and fabric, the sound of brass, and wind, and string resonating throughout the gathered assembly... the smell of sacrifice, incense.

There is an extravagance in the sensuality of the worship God ordered that goes far beyond mere necessity. And all the strangers and aliens and foreigners could sit at table with God's people and taste and see the goodness of our God. This extravagance is participation in the overflowing grace of God, far beyond the provision of mere necessity. Read 1 Kings 7 and the details of the construction of the Temple, and ask: Who are the lilies for?

Why does food matter to God?

d. Food is connected to the gospel – to the story of Christ and all he has accomplished

One of the reasons we use leavened bread for the Eucharist is that the resurrection of Jesus corresponds to the Old Covenant Feast of First Fruits – that is why Paul, in teaching us about the Lord's Table calls Jesus the First Fruit. The bread of Passover was the dry unleavened bread that would fare better in the wilderness – it would be a sensory reminder that we have left Egypt behind. But the bread of the feast of First Fruits is leavened – it's the joy of harvest, of new life, of abundance, of resurrection. So, too, is our bread as we come to taste the true First Fruit, Jesus, the bread of life.

Do you remember the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus – after the resurrection, Jesus talked with them, explaining to them how he (Jesus) had fulfilled everything the

OT had promised and foretold. At the end of the day, they stopped to eat, and when Jesus broke the bread at the beginning of their meal, their eyes were opened, and they saw him for who he really is.

Jesus is the bread of life, and when he completed all that has been made certain by his resurrection, he will host us at table once again. As the father of the prodigal threw a fest for the return of his lost son, so God the Father will throw an even greater feast when he sits at table with all his children. Real bread, real meat, real fruit, real vegetables, real wine – we will feast in the house of Zion, we will feast and weep no more.

1. Why does food matter to God?

2. What is gluttony?

Food is vital to the story of redemption. So, it's no surprise then that food is connected to the rottenness of a spoiled creation. Joy has turned to gluttony. But what is gluttony?

Gluttony is food out of control. Not just food, but all things like food that are the provisions of life that we try to control to our own ends. Gluttony is not addiction per se... like, to our computers or phone screens. It begins with the good and necessary provision, but it says eventually, Grace is not enough.

Dorothy Sayers writes that “Gluttony is warm-hearted. It is the excess and perversion of that free, careless, and generous mood that desires to enjoy life and see others enjoy it. But, like lust and wrath, it is a headless, heedless sin, that puts the good-natured person at the mercy of the cold head and the cold heart.... [it leads to] dearth in the midst of plenty” (92)

Gluttony simply is saying, “I’m not satisfied. I demand... I will take more.”

Rebecca DeYoung says that gluttony is raiding the icebox in search of a cure for spiritual malnutrition.

She goes on to write: Gluttony is not only about pleasure, but also about being able to find our happiness in a pleasure we think we can provide for ourselves. Rather than accepting food as a gift from God, and looking to God to fill our spiritual hungers as well as our bodily ones, we take on God’s responsibility for ourselves. Gluttons want to be in charge of defining their own happiness in pleasure, with its attainment firmly under their own control.

But food may be only the most obvious way we can fall prey to gluttony.

Food is an important way by which we experience joy and satisfaction. We talk about “comfort” food because of the effect those kinds of food have on us – foods that calm us and give us that reassuring settled feeling... life is good, all is well we say to ourselves as we drift off to sleep. Food should bring with it a very real contentment – our honest real needs have been met, we have been sustained, and that is good. But, our demand for comfort grows – and we know what it’s like to look to food... much like

the alcoholic looks to alcohol or the addict looks to the needle to get lost in the comfort we have demanded at the very moment of our craving. Oreo cookies... chips... M&Ms... ice cream... oh, wait... I'm confessing my own sins.

It's true. Our doctors warn us about elevated glucose and urge us to eat wisely. But far too often our comfort comes at the expense of our health and that's a sin. But look at our text – the rich man in Hades is in anguish, but he wants only relief, not salvation. He wants comfort, not deliverance. That is how sin seduces, blinds, and enslaves us.

Food is a powerful symbol for what our bodies desire... and this is true for our sexual behavior and identities too. Paul says to husbands and wives that with respect to your sexual diet, we are free to express our sexual desires with our spouses, but not to the degree that we are indifferent to their desires. We are told in film and social media that our bodies must look a certain way, but if we believe the demands of Western culture, we will starve ourselves and even hurt ourselves if we do not find rest in who we are. Some of you here today are anorexic – some of you are in the grip of fear when it comes to food. Gluttony is the demand that we control our lives so that we are happy with the way we feel about ourselves. But in the same way that we abuse food to feel the comfort of the moment, we abuse our bodies so that the idolatry of food literally leaves us bloated and despairing. It is with great and genuine sympathy that we say to those who live with chaos and pain of dis-ordered sexual attraction or identities, you will not find the comfort and rest and satisfaction you seek by taking control of your own happiness.

Gluttony is not only the attempt to control our physical happiness in its excess. It's also the attempt to control by... what Lewis calls, "delicacy."

Jonathan Bowers introduces an excerpt from CS Lewis this way:

It's possible to seek our satisfaction in the food we consume. It's also possible — and just as dangerous — to seek our satisfaction in the food we avoid. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis — through the mouth of the demon Screwtape — labeled both responses to food as gluttony. The first he called the gluttony of excess; the second, the gluttony of delicacy. Screwtape comments to his young demon pupil about a little old lady in his care.

She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile 'Oh please, please... all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeni-est bit of really crisp toast.' You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognises as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practising temperance

Now Lewis's insight on gluttony brings the sin close to home in some surprising ways.

We are a foodie community, are we not. When it comes to restaurants and produce, that's great. It means that we can become very... particular... and controlling about

what we eat. I'm not talking about food allergies and things like that. So, let's consider a couple of scenarios.

You have a strong scruple against factory farming. You accept an invitation from a friend to come over for burgers. Great! You show up, and your friend pulls out a bag of burgers that he picked up at the drive through. You may argue that you can't eat the burgers on principle. But what you are calling an insistence on principle may be gluttony, the same kind of control as the little old lady. To what degree does love and hospitality constrain you to eat the food offered by your friend in spite of your views about factory farming.

Another scenario. You are a carnivore – you love to consume red meat. You're invited to dinner and discover that your host is a vegetarian, and there is no meat in sight... or...

You're a vegetarian – or a vegan – meat and the whole list of forbidden foods have never crossed your lips. But your host doesn't know that... and presents to the guests a platter of exquisitely marinated and grilled porkchops... wrapped in bacon. I'm not telling you what you should or shouldn't do in that situation, but I am saying that if you don't honestly ask the question about whether or not to eat the meat, if you don't honestly wrestle with what the constraints of love and hospitality require of you... it's possible you are in the grip of gluttony.

So what is gluttony. It is the worship of food (either through consumption or... delicacy... denial) or any other bodily appetite for the purpose of securing and controlling my comfort and happiness. It is the sin of those who hoarded more manna in the wilderness than they needed for one day – the gluttony was a denial that God would provide their needs and it was an attempt to control their lives so that they could secure their own comfort and provision.

We have God-given hunger for many things related to living lives in these bodies of God's design – we hunger for food, for companionship, for sexual fulfillment or identity, for comfort and satisfaction. But when we take the reins to be responsible for satisfying our own hunger, the greasy fingers of gluttony are tightening their grip on our body and soul – tightening their grip around the neck of grace saying, "Give me more!"

Again, Jonathan Bowers writes: Gluttony presents the chief end of man as a table well-stocked and a stomach well-filled. Hunger becomes the great enemy; the refrigerator then stands as the temple where we find our deliverance.

As Graham Tomlin writes: [Note] the ease with which we use food and drink to replace something that's missing from our lives, to comfort us when we feel lonely and to satisfy us when we are not just physically, but also spiritually hungry. Peter Kreeft, an American philosopher and writer, puts it well: 'The motivation for gluttony is the unconscious self-image of emptiness: I must fill myself because I am empty, ghostlike, worthless.' Gluttony is trying to fill a spiritual vacuum with a physical remedy. It is like taking penicillin for a broken heart. There's nothing wrong with penicillin, but it doesn't do much good for a restless soul, and too much of it can lead to all kinds of problems.

1. Why does food matter to God?
2. What is gluttony?

3. How can we eat in such a way that we are spiritually satisfied? In such a way that we are content with God and the bread from heaven.

a. Faith. Not faith of the merely intellectual sort, but faith that animates us. A faith that expresses our deep belief that our deepest needs are met, not by food, but by God and fellowship with him. The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need. Do we believe that?

We will be filled and satisfied when we believe and live lives shaped by the belief that God alone is our greatest need. I need him more than food, more than health, more than sexual satisfaction and identity, more than comfort, more than anything... The greatest hunger of my life is for him.

But, few of us live there... few of us live with that kind of hunger for God

So, what will it take for him to give us that hunger... He may take away some of our gluttonous idols so that we can no longer hunger for them or no longer believe that the refrigerator is the God of all comfort.... so that we can come to believe more deeply that he is all we need and desire.

b. Hospitality. Very often gluttony leads to a solitary life. It's easy to imagine someone, trying to find solace and comfort in a bag of potato chips or a 6-pack of Guinness... sitting alone... reaching mindlessly for the next chip or the next bottle... alone. All that's in view is my own comfort and satisfaction to deaden the loneliness.

So, in very profound way, the antidote to gluttony is... community. Inviting other people to your table... accepting the invitation of others to sit at their table.

In that context eating... and drinking... is not about my own comfort, but it is about enriching the lives of the people around the table.

We have the opportunity to care that others are well-cared for, comforted, and nourished by the community evoked by our eating food. There are whole essays on this theme, notably those of Wendell Berry.

In community, I am no longer the measure of my own contentment. My life is expanded... and the elements of my life are brought into proportion with a greater clarity of purpose when I share my life with you and you share your life with me.

God has created us for each other... for society... and the good things of life have always, from the beginning, been his gifts to help us flourish in community... and together delight in and be good stewards of his bounty.

c. Fasting. The antidote to gluttony is not dieting. It is fasting.

Fasting is not the denial that food is good. No, it's exactly the opposite. Fasting begins with the affirmation that food, and all the comforts associated with our bodily life, are good. They are part of creation and gifts of the Creator.

Fasting is **temporary** – it is a brief time of restraint during which we lay aside a good thing, to lay hold of a better thing. We deny ourselves food, or TV, or email, or chocolate, social media... husbands and wives may even lay aside sexual intimacy... for the purpose of enjoying time in God's presence with fewer distractions.

Fasting is about confronting our demand for control. It is first of all a confession that we have yielded control of our lives to... work, to sex, to money, to food... Fasting begins with repentance – "Lord, I have sinned. These good things have become my gods.

They rule me and tyrannize me. But for this brief time I will say to them... enough... and say to you, You are my God, you only will I serve.” The tentacles of good things entangle our hearts and become idols that choke the life out of us... the tyranny of the urgent. But fasting breaks through these appetites we have and declares that God is in control.

This is why the creational and redemptive 1 and 7 rhythm of life is so important – that we may not be controlled by and worship the good gifts of God

Fasting is about **worship**. It puts life and my desires and needs and longings into perspective. I lay my life before the Lord and place into his hands all the things I hunger for in my life. I confess, I will be satisfied with you alone. As Jesus said in his time of temptation, “We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Fasting is about **justice**. Few of us have ever known real want and hunger. Some have. Most haven't. It is easy for us to focus on our own comfort... on satisfying our own bellies... our own hungers. But fasting hurts. It is a time of deprivation, and we experience the loss. We become agitated and anxious because our hunger has not been satisfied. We are restless and impatient self-absorbed... until our focus shifts from self... to Lazarus stretched out at our gate... The discomfort we feel enables us in a small way to understand something of the suffering of those who are starving for food, for comfort, for belonging, for satisfaction, for acceptance.

When we come back to our regular consumption... when we resume eating and end our fast, will we hold onto that feeling of hunger so that we eat with greater gratitude, and loving restraint – we are more able to weep with those who weep, to feel the bonds of those in prison, to feel the cruelty of those who cannot eat because of injustice. Can I dare eat with indifference

Finally, fasting is about **hope**.

Fasting is a short time of denial of what is good. But fasting will come to an end

But every feast that we've ever eaten, has been joy for only a moment. Every great meal that has filled out tummy with happiness and contentment so begins to rumble... and we look for something to sustain the comfort before it slips away. We eat our fill today, but will have to eat again tomorrow... and the next day... As great as food is, it does not last.

So fasting strengthens our hope for the promise of the final fullness and satisfaction that we will have only in Christ's presents, when we really do sit at table with him. On that day, the hope of the gospel will be fulfilled. All that we have longed for will be satisfied in him... and we will rest.

Paul writes to young pastor Timothy: Godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. Now you would think that if one were godly, contentment is part of the package deal. But Paul is warning Timothy against a spirituality that detaches itself from the world. Godliness with contentment is itself great gain, great wealth. Paul continues: After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. Here is the tension that is the mark of maturity. We enjoy life

to the full – fine wine, good beer, subtle seasonings, ice cream, chocolate. But, as with all the beauty and goodness of the world, we hold all things lightly, with an open hand. As Job said, even in the sorrow of losing his home and family, “The Lord gives. The Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” All that we enjoy comes from his hand, from his table, from his heart. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. (1 Tim. 6:6-8) As we come to his Table, may we take his bread and his wine to our lips and in worship say, You are enough. In you we have all we need. We’re content.