

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Being Human: Sloth and Hunger”  
Rev. Dr. John Judson  
February 25, 2018

Ecclesiastes 2:1-17

Matthew 5:6: Philippians 2:12-13

Finally, we have a sin that we don't have to worry about, Sloth. I say that because if there is any civilization that is always busy, it is ours. We work hard. We play hard. We power-nap. We give 110% if not more...not sure how that is possible but we do. Half of us do not use all the vacation we are owed and as a nation we give up nearly 650 million days of vacation. We are driven to do well and to do better than the person next to us. Sloth? We don't have time for sloth. And in terms of hours worked in a year, well we are only 17<sup>th</sup>, which is due to so many people working part time. So, we need to get going and become number one...work, work, work people. I know that we like to think of whatever the youngest generation coming up as being slothful; that they do not know how to work. But that has been happening since time immemorial. The reality is that we are a hard-working, hard-driving people who spend less time than people in other Western nations stopping to smell the roses, or even to notice them on the way to whatever the next “thing” is we need to do. I suppose then that we could just let sloth go, except...except we can't, because it has nothing to do with laziness and everything to do with our inner-lives.

The sin of sloth is not about being lazy. It is not about not going for all the gusto. It is a spiritual disease. One way to describe sloth is that it occurs when we go into spiritual retirement. Spiritual retirement happens when we decide that we have learned all that we can learn, that we know all that we can know about this God stuff, so we no longer need to bother trying to grow in faith and faithfulness. We have been to church, check. We've prayed, check. We have tried to make the world better, check. We've learned all we can learn, check. We've done all that we can do, check. Time to kick back, relax and go into spiritual retirement. And, so long as I stay busy it is all good. This is why Paul warns his readers that they are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. He senses that it is easy for Christians to go into spiritual retirement, to believe that as long as they have professed Jesus, then all is well and nothing more needs to be done. He insists instead, that they ought to continually be at work, living their faith. Even so, this still raises the question of why does Sloth rate a place in the top seven sins. Sure, we are to be working on our lives of faith, but is spiritual retirement all that bad?

The answer is that spiritual retirement leads to spiritual starvation, which ultimately cripples our very humanity. It leads us to becoming no more than empty shells of what God created us to be. One way to think about this is to consider how we maintain our physical existence. We do so by eating and drinking. We know that we need to consume carbs and

proteins, fruits and vegetables and an occasional cheeseburger. We know that we need to stay hydrated. We need to drink enough to keep our body going. The same is true for our souls. For if we believe scripture, there is more to us than our physical existence. There is an inner life of the soul. This needs to be fed as well. And it is fed through what the church has called the means of grace, or spiritual practices. These include things such as worship, prayer, service, fellowship, scripture study; actions that allow God to fill us with God's presence and power. It is in these actions that we are made into the people God created us to be. The gift of God, as Jesus tells us, is that if we hunger and thirst for God's presence, we will be filled.

Jesus puts it this way, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. To be clear here, we ought to recall that righteousness is not self-righteousness. It is not about becoming somehow morally better than everyone else. Righteousness here means living in right relationship with God. It means staying connected to God and living as God desires. It means taking in the love and grace of God and giving it away to others. The only way we can do that then, as Jesus says, is to hunger and thirst for it. We are to not only know that we need this spiritual nourishment, but we are to desire it. We are to remember, as I said a moment ago, that as surely as food and water nourish our physical selves, our connection with God nourishes our inner-selves. And so, when we desire these things, Jesus tells us that we will be filled. We will be filled with the love of God. We will be filled with the presence of God. And rather than end up like the writer of Ecclesiastes who could find no meaning and purpose in his life, we will find ourselves continually challenged with new opportunities to love God and neighbor.

This morning we are given a wonderful opportunity. We are given the opportunity to be fed both physically and spiritually at this table. In the bread and cup, we see, touch and taste God's love for us. We connect with God. As we pass the elements from one to another we connect in community with others.

My challenge for you then on this morning is this, to ask yourselves, how am I hungering and thirsting after God such that I am filled and made fully human again?