

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Being Human: Lust and the Pure in Heart”
Rev. Dr. John Judson
March 18, 2018

2 Samuel 13: 1-2, 7-19

Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:4-9

You saw it. You heard about it. You have to have it. It is the 208-in-one tool that will allow you to take apart and put back together a Boeing 777. And it fits in your pocket. You saw it. You heard about it. You have to have it. It is the two-pound burger with a pound of bacon inside. You can just taste it melting in your mouth. You saw it. You heard about it. You have to have it. It is the i-phone twenty. Not only does it search the internet and make phone calls. It thinks for you and makes your coffee in the morning. You saw it. You heard about it. You have to have it. It is the self-driving sedan that has 400 horsepower, goes 167mph and will give you a massage on the way to work. You saw it. You heard about it. You have to have it. Then you get it and suddenly, it is just a tool, a burger, a phone and a car. You wonder why you had to have it. You have buyer's remorse...but wait there is something else. You see it. You hear about it. You have to have it. Ever been there...even a little? Well if you have then you have had at least a mild case of Lust.

I realize that most of you, when you heard that the sin of the week was lust, were probably expecting me to talk about sex. And that would make sense since most dictionary definitions imply that lust and sex are inseparable; and all of the reference material I use to prepare my sermons focuses on sex, and nothing more; and that so much of what we read in the Bible about lust seems to have to do with sex. Yet, lust is about far more than sex. In fact, excessive sexual lust is only one of many symptoms of lust. Think about how we use the word. People lust for power. They lust for wealth. They lust for fame. They lust for sex. With that in mind, how then should we define lust? Since you asked, here is my definition. Lust is the desperate drive to be complete. Let me explain.

All human beings are born incomplete. What I mean by this is that all human beings are born with a need to be in communion with God and neighbor. We have this place inside of us that can only be filled by authentic love and relationship. We can see this in the second creation story when God says of Adam, it is not good for man to be alone...and not simply because he can't load the dishwasher correctly. It is that we are created to be complete only in community. Unfortunately, all of us, to some degree or another never find ourselves completed. So, we hunt for those things that will accomplish that task. The problem with this is that, to paraphrase country singer Johnny Lee, we go looking for completeness in all the wrong places. We look for it in sex, in material possessions, in experiences and so on. What happens when we don't find that thing that completes us is that we become more and more desperate, and lust is born. It becomes this insatiable craving for completeness. And unfortunately, this desperate desire not only leaves those who have it unhappy and incomplete, but it leaves behind it a wake of pain and destruction.

This understanding of lust is at the heart of our Old Testament lesson this morning. The characters involved are Amnon and Tamar. They are step siblings. Amnon “falls in love” with his step

sister so much so that he becomes “ill.” This my friends is not love, but lust. It is a desperate desire to be made complete. Somehow Amnon believes that if he can “have” Tamar, that his life will be full. The problem is that she does not share his lust. The result is that Amnon, with the help of a friend, devises a scheme so that he can have Tamar. When she refuses, his lust causes him to rape her. The results of this horrific act are first, that Amnon becomes disgusted with Tamar because his rape of her did not complete him, and Tamar’ life is destroyed because she is no longer a virgin and so cannot marry. This is how lust works. It focuses on an object. Obsesses over the object. Gains the object. Then is deeply disappointed when the object does not fulfill their longing for completeness, which leads to the object being discarded. Lust leaves the one lusting unhappy and the thing or person, lusted after, abandoned and used up.

We might think, that after almost three thousand years, we would have learned to deal with lust. Unfortunately, rather than learning to deal with it, we have learned how to use it. We have learned how to use lust to make money. The pornography industry has learned how to use sexual lust to sell magazines and videos. The food services industry has learned how to use it to draw us in to eat food that is probably not the best for us. The smart phone industry uses it to sell the latest phone that is probably not much better than the one we have now. In fact, Apple is worried that lust for their phones may be running out. And Kia has Emmerson Fittipaldi driving his car, with tires smoking with a 365hp engine, hoping that our car and speed lust will draw us into their dealerships. And in the end, these lusts lead us to be unhappy, disappointed, in debt, with poor health and often with broken and shattered relationships. All of this leads to the question, how do we complete ourselves and leave lust behind?

The answer is that we become those with purity of heart. Blessed are the pure in heart Jesus says, for they will see God. In our culture, to speak of purity often brings up an image of some holier-than-thou, glowing figure dressed in white, who never has any fun. Purity in Greek has a very different meaning. It is more closely linked with the idea of purifying something by removing the impurities that are in it and adding beneficial ones to it. You can think of it as what we do with water. We floc it to separate sediment, then we filter it and then we purify it while at the same time we add fluoride to it to make it ever better. This is a good way to think about Jesus’ use of pure. The pure are those who are in the process of ridding themselves of the objects of their affections that do not complete them, while at the same time filling themselves with those that do. They are intentionally moving their focus away from non-life completing “things”, and back to those attributes and virtues that allow them to connect with God and neighbor, thereby finding completeness; namely those things that Paul writes about in his letter to the church in Philippi. He writes, *“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

Lust is out there. Lust is in here (in us). It is the result of being incomplete human beings. But you and I have a choice as to how we let it drive our lives. We can give in to it and find ourselves continually disappointed and unhappy. Or we can begin purifying our hearts by removing the objects of lust and replacing them with the virtues of God, and in the process, seeing the love of God filling our lives

and moving us toward completion. That is my challenge then, to ask ourselves, how are we working to purify our lives that we might be made complete and whole in Christ?