

Glittering Vices: Gluttony

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

5th in a seven-part series

October 5, 2014

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Matthew 4:1-4 (NIV)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

John 6:35-40 (NRSV)

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Mark 14:17-26 (NIV)

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

²⁰ “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me.”

²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them.

²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

“Virtuous people avail themselves of the things of this life with the moderation of a user, not the attachment of a lover.” . . . Augustine

What or whom do you really love in life? How much time, money, and attention do you give to the object of your affections and desires? Suppose a little green man from Mars followed you around for a couple of weeks. How would he answer that question for you? Would the little fellow say that based on his careful observations your obvious first love is exercise or tv or food or boating or wine or sex or [fill in the blank]?

Gluttony is often thought of as merely being about overeating. And certainly food can be a problem for lots of Christians. Our food choices not only can harm our health, they can reflect blindness to those in need. For the church fathers, overeating was a sin not only for its spiritual and physical effects on the Christian, but because the money spent on such over-consumption could have been used to feed the poor. Until about 150 years ago, most of human life was spent in a struggle to get enough calories to survive. Sadly, in way too much of the world this is still the case. When we study the gospels in my classes, I try to help students understand why so many of Jesus’ parables about the kingdom of God involve banquets and dinner. In a world where everyone is living on a subsistence diet, there is hardly a more powerful image of a restored and renewed world than an over-flowing buffet.

However, for those of us at St. Andrew, struggling to survive on a meager diet isn't really a problem. Nonetheless, food can still be a problem. For some of us, maintaining our weight is a constant problem. When you are trying to keep pounds off, it is pretty amazing how much of your day can be spent on food related matters. There is also something we probably need to hear about the amount of money we spend eating out. What if we gave some of that up and contributed that money to feeding others? It is easy for us to become like the rich man who never actively harmed Lazarus, but simply ignored him.

In the end, gluttony is the inordinate attention paid to food or other things. Gluttony is about the loss of moderation in all things, not just food. I know that there have been times in my life when I used food to paper over a problem with my spirit, to bring me a little comfort. Goodness, we even call certain delicacies "comfort food." Ever notice how those "comfort foods" tend to be high in calories? We want the comforting pleasure that the piece of chocolate cake will bring. Who hasn't been there from time to time?

The glittering vices, however, are about *habits* we fall into. When I'm stressed out, do I first, habitually, reach for the cake or for a bottle? Do I even "treat" myself in anticipation of the stress? Those are the kinds of questions we have to ask ourselves. DeYoung writes:

The main question we should be asking is not, "How much is too much?" but rather, "How dominated by the desire for this pleasure am I? How difficult would it be to have to give it up or do without it?" The trouble with gluttony is that it reduces eating to an exercise in gratifying my own desires for physical pleasures, consuming whatever I think will make me full and satisfied. Rather than simply enjoying food, we are using it to give ourselves a needed "pleasure fix." Food and pleasure are goods, not gods. As Aquinas puts it, "Gluttony primarily and intrinsically signifies the intemperate desire to consume food, not the intemperate consumption of food." "It is a case of gluttony," he says, "only when we knowingly exceed the measure in eating from a desire for the pleasures of the palate."

Gluttony's excessive pursuit of the pleasures of the table eventually dulls our appreciation for the food we eat, the pleasure we take in eating it, those with whom we eat, and the God who created what we eat and gave us the ability to take pleasure in it. As Augustine put it, "Virtuous people avail themselves of the things of this life with the moderation of a user, not the attachment of a lover." Or, as Jesus Christ put it, we were not meant to live "by bread alone" (Luke 4: 4).¹

You can take DeYoung's paragraphs and insert other activities in place of eating. Exercise? Sports? TV? Wine? Sex? When Jesus says, "man does not live by bread alone," you can substitute any of these for "bread." The question for us is this: In what or whom do we seek nourishment, satisfaction, and joy? To quote DeYoung again, are we feeding our face while starving our heart?

"Feeding your face and starving your heart"

More than 3,000 years ago, the Hebrew slaves who escaped from Pharaoh faced starvation. The problem was that there just hadn't been much time to pack. When Moses said go, everyone had simply dashed for the Red Sea. They somehow found the time to plunder the Egyptians, grabbing jewelry and clothing, but they had not prepared any food provisions other than some loaves of unleavened bread.² When the Hebrew slaves reached the safety of the Sinai wilderness, they realized that choosing gold over food had perhaps not been the best decision and they began to complain, "you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger"

¹ DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk (2009-06-01). *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (p. 141). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

²The bread they take is unleavened because there was not even enough time to wait for the bread to rise.

(Exodus 16:3). But of course, they were completely wrong. They were God's people and God would provide for them. Soon, God began raining "manna" upon them, the "bread from heaven," a flakey, nutritious substance that could be gathered off the ground each morning. When the sun grew hot, this bread from heaven melted, but there was no need to store any food. God provided them with fresh manna every day. A powerful reminder that God provides every day.

More than a millennia later, descendants of these Hebrew slaves gathered along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee anxious to see the miracle-working teacher named Jesus. It was a crowd of thousands and Jesus asked one of his disciples, Philip, where they could buy bread for everyone to eat. They would surely need nourishment as the day wore on. (see John 6)

Philip told Jesus that feeding the crowd would take far more money than any of them had. But a boy came forward with a few loaves and a few fish. Jesus told everyone to sit, gave thanks for the food, and then gave it to be distributed to everyone – and a few loaves became enough to feed thousands.

Jesus, realizing that the crowd would demand more from him, went up a nearby mountain and later that night, made his way back across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum – by foot!

The next day, the crowd finds Jesus again and he tells them that they only followed him because of the previous day's miracle. And then, he tries to take them to a whole new place. Jesus tells them that he can do better than some loaves of bread that will grow stale and old anyway, he can offer them "the food that endures for eternal life," namely himself, "for it is on [Jesus] that God the Father has set his seal" (John 6:27).

Now, I'm sure that the folks on the seashore that day were confused and mystified at this, but like the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4), they want what they think Jesus is selling. She wanted "living water" so that she wouldn't have to make the trek to Jacob's well anymore, and the crowd is surely hoping for a lifetime bread supply. All they want to know is what work they have to do to get such bread. Jesus replies that they must simply "believe in him whom he [God the Father] has sent" (6:29).

Naturally, they expect something akin to what God provided to their ancestors, bread falling from heaven. But that isn't what Jesus is talking about at all, for the manna, though God-sent, was *not* the "true bread of heaven . . . that gives life to the world."

"I am the bread of life"

The crowds are still waiting to get their bellies filled when Jesus declares to them, "I am the bread of life." Jesus is the nourishment needed for our life with God. This is the first of seven profound moments in John's Gospel when Jesus declares "I am the . . ." Why seven? Because it is the number that signified wholeness and completeness; God created the cosmos in seven days. Why is the "I am" significant? Because it is the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush (see Exodus 3).³

This simple statement had to rock the crowd back on its heels. Jesus, this man from Nazareth, is the bread from heaven, he says, sent by God the Father, so that who believes in him may have eternal life. Jesus is the nourishment, the bread, that sustains eternal life, which neither hunger nor thirst can touch. Further, it is Jesus who will raise the dead on the last day!

³ On seven other occasions in John's gospel, Jesus makes absolute "I AM" declarations. For example, earlier in chapter, Jesus walks on water to reach the disciples' boat in the night. They are terrified, of course, and Jesus says, "I AM; do not be afraid" (v. 20). The translation is typically, "It is I; be not afraid" as in the NRSV and NIV. But such a translation masks the literal "I am" in the Greek. Like pretty much everything else in John's gospel, all these "I am" statements signify Jesus' divinity. He is not only the Messiah, but God.

Let's be clear here: Jesus is claiming to be much more than the miraculous manna of the Exodus. The path to true life lies through him. He will do what only God can do – resurrect the dead. To some, even many, who listened this must have seemed blasphemous. Little wonder that Jesus' claims drew quick opposition (v. 41-42).

But Jesus is not through. He is the bread of life, the nourishment needed for eternal life. "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v. 51). And so Jesus brings the crowd to the cross and to the deep mystery of his body and his blood. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day . . . those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide⁴ in me , and I in them."

One can't miss the sacramental language here, speaking to the deep mystery of what we call Holy Communion. These words help us to understand why most Christians have seen Holy Communion as more than a mere remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Instead, we embrace the truth that in the bread and the cup, Christ is present. It is the bread of heaven, Jesus the Christ, who nourishes us for eternal life, who will sustain our bodies in this life and the next. Jesus is the nourishment that satisfies our longing for peace, joy, and fulfillment. Make Jesus your habit!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. I'm pretty sure we've all been tempted to gluttony in one form or another. What is your story? What are ways you have fed your stomach and starved your heart? What or whom do you really love?
2. We usually think of gluttony as being about over-eating, but could it also be about paying too much attention to food (or anything else), whether it is eating too much or paying too much attention to what we eat. In the C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, one devil describes to another his work in tempting people into the "gluttony of delicacy," not just the "gluttony of excess." Here's his example:

She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered to 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 weeniest 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 recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others . . . The real value of the quiet, unobtrusive work which [the devil] has been doing for years on this old woman can be gauged by the way in which her belly now dominates her whole life. The woman is in what may be called the "All-I-want" state of mind.⁵

What do you think Lewis means. How could this example reflect the vice of gluttony?

3. How does the feeding of the thousands with a few loaves (v. 11) set up what follows? There is no Last Supper scene in John's gospel – could Jesus' breaking of the bread here be such a moment? How does the story of Jesus walking on water fit into this chapter? We can connect the manna story easily, but what makes Jesus the "true" bread of heaven? How does Jesus contrast himself with the story of the manna in the wilderness? As Jesus goes on, how closely does he identify himself with the Father? Wouldn't the Jews think that it is God who is to resurrect? Can you see what makes some of his fellow Jews so angry? Can you see that Jesus *is* blaspheming unless his claims are true? As Jesus takes the crowd deeper into the mystery of his flesh and his blood, what do you think the crowd was making of all this? Would it only make sense, such as it does, to someone living post-cross, post-resurrection. John's Gospel begs to be chewed over and gnawed on. Take and eat, indeed.

⁴ *Abide* is one of those words that we find in our Bibles, but rarely use ourselves. It translates the Greek word, *meno*, which is variously translated as "remain," "stay," "endure," "abide," and "continue." John uses *meno* to convey the permanence of Christ's relationship with his people and with each of us as individuals. This permanence is a deep, active, and very real union – we are *in* Christ and Christ is *in* us, both being favorite formulations of Paul's.

⁵ DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk (2009-06-01). *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (p. 141). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Genesis 3:1-7 Eve eats the forbidden fruit.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Exodus 16:1-5 The Israelites are convinced they will starve, but God feeds them daily.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Luke 16:19-31 A rich man turns a blind eye to a starving man.</p>	<p>Thursday, Romans 16:17-18 Some people are serving themselves, their own appetites (for power and influence?), rather than Jesus Christ.</p>
<p>Friday, Philippians 3:17-21 “Their god is their stomach.”</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class – now studying 2 Samuel

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Hebrews

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our Current Series:

*Ten Things You Don't Have to Believe to be a
Jesus-lovin', Bible-totin' Christian*

Dr. Eben Alexander, author of *Proof of Heaven*

October 15

7pm

Smith Worship Center

Dr. Alexander will be speaking about his new book, *Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People are Proving the After-life*. It has been awhile since we hosted an author, but this should be an entertaining and provocative event. At 6pm, there will be an author reception in Festival Hall. The cost is \$25/person and will include a signed copy of the book.

You can buy tickets online at www.standrewumc.org.

On Sunday, Oct. 19, Scott Engle will teach a special class at 11:00 in Festival Hall. Scott will respond to Dr. Alexander's presentation and review the Christian teachings about the after-life.

Sermon Notes
