

Life over death (Gluttony)

Psalm 130, Ezekiel 37:1 – 14, John 11:17 – 27, 38 – 45

I want to compliment you on hanging in there for the sermons we have been having this Lent. “The Seven Deadly Sins” doesn’t sound particularly uplifting. I have found the sermons all personally challenging but beneficial all the same.

You will have heard the latter part of the saying (taken over by the church but originally said by Finlay Peter Dunne) “The Newspaper does everything for us” and listed several surprising things. Then he added it “comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.”¹

“CS Lewis believed that we must be remade and made ready for paradise and its joys.”² Part of the remaking often involves dismantling.

Some of you will know that Robin Frengley has been away for about a month, staying at his son’s home in Port Chalmers. He went there to help his son with major renovations to his old villa. Welcome back Robin! Robin was telling me that the house was originally weatherboard but had been covered over with stucco. You can imagine they found some serious rot and damp underneath the plaster covering. To make matters worse, when they ripped up the floor boards, they found the piling to be very inadequate. There was a lot more work to be done than anyone had anticipated.

Robin found himself (this is my paraphrase of what he told me) having to slow down the process at times. He saw that the dismantling, must be done thoroughly, in order to build something beautiful. Neither did he want to waste materials by doing work that would need to be redone. I’m sure, Robin was very gracious in his advice. Robin didn’t accomplish all he had hoped on the house. However his relationship with his son was strengthened greatly as they worked together on something that will last.

Our relationship with our Lord, is also greatly strengthened if we allow Him to point out what needs to be done and to help us do it.

Our aim throughout Lent is to help each one of us move closer to Christ. Our relationship with our Lord does grow, when we are aware of what is happening under the surface in our lives. We have God’s promise that he will work in us. Our sentence for today is so encouraging: **I’m bringing the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life.** Ezekiel 37:5 **We can all have that life, if we allow the Lord to breathe on us.**

So today we are talking about gluttony. Yay! All of us who are a little overweight now get to experience some of the discomfort we talked about earlier. The trim ones among you can relax – not!

¹ Finlay Peter Dunne (1867 – 1936)

² Surprised by Laughter; The comic world of CS Lewis. Terry Lindvall, 77

Confession: I love food. Is that a problem?

- Way back in the garden, God commanded us to eat. “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” except, hmmm, we know what follows....
Genesis 2:15
- We are to eat, drink and make the most of our daily work as the Preacher tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:13
- James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

So enjoying one’s food is not gluttony necessarily. The apostle Paul lists gluttons and drunkards along with those who abuse, cheat people, or sin sexually. (1 Cor 6) His point is that those things are a problem as soon as **they master us. If we are not in control, then something else is.**

We’ve seen that all the sins are not what they seem on the surface. They all have a spiritual root – one that **substitutes something for intimacy with God**. Gluttony is no exception. Frederick Buechner says “A glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for a spiritual malady.”³ Gluttony is not just about overeating, though that is part of it. Gluttony is about focusing on pleasure, especially pleasure that has the immediate feel good factor. Gluttony is a sticking plaster we cover our wound with; it takes away the sting and gives us a quick-fix, or so we think.

The author of the Seven Glittering Vices⁴ , tells us we should be asking ourselves, not so much about how much we eat, but more about whether we use food as a substitute for something else.

She talks about the different forms of gluttony using FRESH as an acronym:

Fastidiously
Ravenously
Excessively
Sumptuously
Hastily

Eating fastidiously or sumptuously both focus on **what** we eat. Everyone knows eating too much is wrong but we can be overly fussy. That means we eat exactly what we like and nothing else, forcing others to pander to our preferences. As a child I hated eating gristle and fat on meat; still do. I hope that if I was somewhere that required eating those things, I could do so without giving offence to the hosts.

Eating sumptuously is about the **amount** we eat. “I must always feel full” is the maxim this person has. Eating rich foods produces this feeling. Giving up chocolate for Lent is one way of denying this physical pleasure, in order to focus on Jesus; who he is and what he has done for us.

³ Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking

⁴ Based on Seven Glittering Vices, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, 140 - 157

The other three aspects of gluttony are probably what we think about more often. Eating ravenously, excessively or hastily are about **how** we eat. Eating too quickly, too greedily or too much at once is not good for our physical health sake or our spiritual health. Health experts advise us to stop what we are doing, to take a break while we eat. It aids our digestion, means we are concentrating, and are less likely to under or over eat. In the playground, sometimes I see children eating their lunch as quickly as possible, so they can get to the monkey bars or the playing fields. I confess to occasionally eating at my computer. Kevin tells me off if I do that.

Last week Karl talked about anger. It's very possible to experience anger that is righteous, one should be angry about injustice, but to express that anger in the wrong way. It is also possible to eat the right food in the wrong way. A quote from Rebecca: "The question is not whether we are fat or thin, polite or impolite, but whether we are eating to satisfy our own wants, in a way that elevates our own satisfaction above other good things."

The need to eat and the desire to enjoy good food is part of being human; it's a God-given desire. It's only when the desire gets out of control that it's a problem.

Gluttony can become a habit. A couple of weeks back the quote on my emails was from a road sign.⁵ It goes like this "Choose your rut carefully. You'll be in it for the next 200 miles." Any habit is difficult to break. Gluttony is no exception.

Lent is an excellent time for working on a habit that is unhealthy and perhaps even sinful. As always Jesus is our example. Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Jesus is so much more than a good example though. In the Gospel story about Lazarus death and resurrection, we see Jesus anger at death:

V33 When Jesus saw Mary weeping ... a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled.

V38 Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance.

V39 "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them.

Martha recognises there will be a smell. Sin stinks. It is death not life. Lazarus was no greater sinner than any of us. He didn't die directly because of any particular sin. Yet he was dead, and our sin, whatever it is, brings a gradual, but inevitable spiritual death, if we **deliberately and repeatedly walk in that sin.**

"Roll the stone aside Lazarus come out!" commands Jesus.

⁵ Both Australia and Alaska seem to claim the quote.

There's scene in The Fellowship of the Ring movie. Balrog, the fiery demon is trying to kill Bilbo and his friends in the caves. Gandalf bellows "You shall not pass." It's a very powerful scene greatly aided by special effects. Jesus' power is far superior to Gandalf's. I imagine Jesus said it quietly and firmly; "Lazarus come out", and the demons trembled, and death is reversed, vanquished, defeated – at least temporarily for Lazarus.

Imagine what it would have been like to be Ezekiel and accompany God to see a valley full of human skeletons. He has got to be feeling either totally depressed or freaked out as he surveys the scene. God asks "Can these bones come to life?" Ezekiel is obviously a reverent and humble man. Martha (probably many of us) would say "Of course not, not in a million years." But Ezekiel knows God well; he knows that God is Sovereign and can do anything. And God does not disappoint.

V9 Then God said, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'"

The sovereign Lord chooses to work in partnership with Ezekiel, who responds in obedience.

V10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

The bones came to life. Lazarus walked out of the tomb. Gluttony can be defeated and we can be changed.

George MacDonald used the analogy of a house for our own lives. He states that God is "getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on. presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. ... The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."⁶

Close module

You and I are the houses God wants to completely renovate. It doesn't matter how young or old, busy or quiet, whatever personality we have God wants us to be remade. He wants us to have new life in him so that we can choose our behaviours and not be in an unhealthy rut.

The time is right now for us to commit to working with him. Let's spend a moment in quiet reflection now. You have a talk with God about gluttony, or whatever, and ask him to work on you from the inside out.

Pause

God promises to do whatever you have asked him to. Amen

⁶ Borrowed by CS Lewis in Surprised by Joy, 213.