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**Deadly Sins: Sloth**  
*Whatever Became of Sin?*

**Luke 10:25-37**

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’

<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

**The WORD of the LORD**

When Lent began just a few weeks ago, the world looked very different. That was when you could count on things needed being on the shelves of the grocery store. That was when you could count on places of business and social gatherings—up and running, ready to serve—restaurants, department stores, hair salons, schools, courts, airports, sports team, support groups, churches.

Here *at* the church—as Lent began, we had just put away our leftover ashes from Ash Wednesday and were planning ahead for those palms that would help us celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Easter lilies were, of course, on order to grace the sanctuary for that most celebrated day of the Church year...*the Day of Resurrection*. The day when everything *really did change*. The day when Life conquered death. The day that gives context to all other days.

Throughout the following weeks the sun still rose and set, but earth beneath the heavens *sure* began to look different. At first it was somewhere else, not here. And with the usual human response of relief that’s it’s not us...we carried on.

But then it managed to find its way first to Texas...and then to us in Boerne. In the midst of all of that... *and the breaking news about it* ...we continued a Lenten series that asked the question, “*Whatever Became of Sin?*”

Now I ask you, *does that really matter at this point?* Isn’t sin something we should be thinking about when we have nothing better to do...discussed around tables in a Sunday School class, coffee in hand... or preached about in our sanctuary?

Instead...here we are online...only a handful of us in the sanctuary...asking more than *whatever became of sin; asking...whatever will become of us?*

I wonder, if perhaps, the two are tied. Sin and what becomes of us.

This is an urgent time when many of us are just wanting to make it to the end of whatever this is—make it with as much intact as we can manage-- our health and the health of those so important to us... our freedom and comfort... our future and financial well- being.

But thinking about sin is not just an ethereal activity...as we have seen. Even in the land of plenty, now you can’t buy toilet paper in many places or bread in others. The problem isn’t scarcity; it’s hoarding.

Ironically last week’s sermon on Greed and Gluttony addressed two sins that have taken on real form. Who would have ever thought that the need to “have” --based on growing fear of

lack...would appear so quickly? It was certainly manifest in the panic to stockpile things while leaving others without.

I could not have offered up a better visual example than the rows of empty shelves at HEB. Or the long lines to get in the doors of a daily *restocked* store.

It seems that sin- in its many forms- is latent in us all, and it can appear when least expected, surprising even the perpetrator.

Crisis is a time when such things appear in spades; when people get edgy; when their usual generosity and kindness dries up. It's as if all energy is stored up just to survive at all costs.

Crisis is a revealer of many things like ...*what we value, who and what we trust; and certainly, the context of our lives.*

Crisis reveals some of the worst, but it can also reveal some of the best. It can bring out our "better angels."

Better angels are really great messengers of hope and care; and I'm glad to say they are alive and well among us at St. Mark.

People are checking on each other, all level of skill sets are coming together to bring good worship online; care team efforts are in the planning; frequent contact is happening, errands are being run for those who can't get out –food is being offered. The list goes on.

You see, crisis, for all its challenges, also can have strange benefits...like encouraging us *to reevaluate our lives, to rethink our priorities; to reconnect with people we've neglected in our very important busyness...to recommit ourselves to doing the good we know to do.*

It's gotten to be a trite phrase, but it happens to be true most of time: *We're better together.*

And that's what makes this particular crisis so difficult. The very thing we're inclined to do is the very thing we can't do and stay well, that is- "be together." At least not literally. And so, we're trying new ways of connecting, including this one.

Despite what's going on...we're continuing to look at the role of sin in our lives. Sin, as brokenness, division, wounds...not just bad deeds. And as we do so, we move to one of the most insidious forms of sin, that is, sloth or acedia, as it is also known.

We've looked at anger and lust as those sins that make objects of the other. We've looked at greed and gluttony as those sins that try to fill emptiness obsessively and wrongly. And now sloth.

We began with a scripture reading that is one of the most familiar in all of the Bible—the Story of the Good Samaritan. It is a story told by Jesus in answer to a lawyer's question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

By all appearances, it was a significant question, although one to test Jesus.

Like many conversations with Jesus, a question does not always get an answer. Often the response is just another question, as it was in this case. "What is written in the law? Jesus asked. What do you read there?"

It seems we do not always read what is written...so two questions were warranted.

Or maybe we read shallowly...looking at the letter of the law, missing the spirit of the law altogether.

The lawyer knew the letter of the law and he answered correctly.

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* And Jesus affirmed his answer.

It was the follow up question that made the whole exchange far more difficult for the lawyer but may more helpful for us.

“And who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked.. (Afterall you wouldn’t want to do such extreme things as love everyone as you love yourself if you didn’t have to). Law and Spirit can divide on a technicality.

That’s when Jesus told the story of a man travelling to Jericho-- a dangerous journey for all travelers. On the way he was robbed, beaten and left for half dead. A priest and a Levite...saw him and...passed by on the other side. They were the religious leaders of the day.

Finally, a Samaritan-- a perona non grata-- not only stopped to help- *exposing himself to the same fate*—he did more. He packed up the man and took him to an inn where he could care for him. The next day he turned his care over to the innkeeper leaving money to cover things, but also promising to pay for whatever else was the cost.

End of story. Then Jesus asked a question:

“Who was the neighbor?” And the lawyer again answered rightly, “the one who showed him mercy.”

Interesting...not the two you might expect to show mercy—the pious people...the priest and the Levite.

Somehow now all boundaries of defining neighbor have expanded ...beyond someone like us, who may share our religious beliefs or world view, values, status ... to just anyone in our path who is in need. It expands to all humanity.

Who is the neighbor? Actually. both men were neighbors...both the man wounded...and the one who helped. And that’s because they were connected by human need and human care.

It could have been the priest and the Levite; but instead, this act of love happened between two people who probably had very little in common except need and response. No doubt, the Samaritan might one day find himself in trouble and need a neighbor.

In the story, we saw compassion, but also victimization ... by the robbers and by the priest and the Levite.

It was a sin of omission, walking by on the other side...a sin none the less...the sin of sloth.

This sin of sloth is tough to understand. It's not the same as a teenage boy's messy bedroom, or a disheveled beggar's clothing or a shanty dwelling. It's more than laziness; or messiness; or even being unkempt, unclean.

In the world of the spirit, sloth is something much deeper, much more insidious. It comes from the word *acedia*...meaning "not caring"—it is detachment; disengagement; disinterest. You might say...it's passing by on the other side. It is life as a spectator, an observer, not a participant. It is exhibited in seeing people as the "other." What you hear from the mouth of sloth is: *That's not my problem*. The wrong... is not what is done... but what is not done. It is the sin of neglect and detachment,...detachment from another human being, from feelings of empathy, from redeeming action.

Dorothy Sayers, in her usual, "get to the point summary of sin" in her work, *The Other Six Deadly Sins*...wrote about the manifestation of sloth as a kind of cynicism. She wrote:

"It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to do nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for."

(Clearly Dorothy Sayers...who is recognized for her theological mind—is also one who can write murder mysteries). She describes an extreme version of sloth. But there are others and the scary thing is that all sins, including sloth can find their way into us...and take root in our lives. We are not exempt from this one either.

Sloth or *acedia* is often manifest when we become numb or dead to things in life ...to things human, as well as, divine.

It seems we are meant for each other; we're part of each other. "Any man's death diminishes me," the poet John Donne wrote. "When one part of the body hurts the whole body, hurts," the Apostle Paul wrote. When we don't feel that way, something is wrong.

Another insightful writer described a different sloth might be manifest. "Sloth is the loss of one's spiritual mooring in life ...*and sensing this spiritual vacuum*... it manifests itself in despondency and in flight from the worship of God and the service to other people.

The name, "noon day demon" was actually attached to the sin of sloth by the Egyptian monastic community in the 4 or 5th century. They saw it as something that haunted and paralyzed people not at night but in the light of day. These were not people who had no religious beliefs; rather they were people who knew God and yet had lost the sense of the love of God; had lost their sense of purpose and meaning; had lost their sense of being connect, of being a neighbor.

The "noon day demon"—was experienced as a kind of despondency, as well detachment. It was something that could lead eventually to what they called "the dark night of the soul" or "the night sea journey." That's when there's almost a complete loss of faith, a loss of a way of life; a loss of joy and meaning; a loss of love and care.

Sloth clearly runs the gamut.. At its best it is a kind of dryness, detachment, or boredom. At it's worse it can be experienced as depression, despair, and hopelessness.

It can clearly be a religious person's problem, as well as, as the problem for someone who claims no faith. It's a sin, that can, like other sins, become a diagnosable sickness; a condition that needs medical or psychological help as well as spiritual help. It can also be a social sin resulting in a society that doesn't care about the vulnerable; a society with systems and institutions that themselves victimize people.

The story Jesus told was one of attachment and detachment. Attachment brought healing to the wounded; detachment passed by on the other side.

The lawyer may have started it, but Jesus asked the final question ...”which man was the neighbor to the wounded man?” The lawyer’s answer captured the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law... “the man who loved as he would want to be loved”... the man who showed mercy.

And therein is was the secret to eternal life, to life ongoing,

“What must I do to *inherit* eternal life is not a question of how to *earn* this endless life? Inheritance is a gift.. And the way to receive or inherit ongoing life...to be truly alive....is to love God who all that you are and love your neighbor...as you love yourself. The bible makes the case that if you don’t love your neighbor you might not love yourself either, because it seems we are connected to the source of all love...to God who is love.

Everyone, of us... at some time or another... is the man on the road to Jericho...many of us are that man now. We’re being robbed of at least peace of mind and freedom to do as we please; we’re being robbed of stability; security on many fronts; we may be robbed of wellness for a while or even robbed of those we know...and love...who fall victim. We’re beaten by the onslaught of “what could be; “what used to be,” “ what’s happening now” “what’s not happening now.”

Yet, for all of that, we still don’t have to be the victim...we can be cared for by each other and we can be empowered to become those who, in turn, care.

And so, this season of Lent is not the time for passing by on the other side—though we do have that “ six foot rule!”

This is the time to bring out our better angels. This is the time to live in the shelter of each other. Even though we’ve been told to shelter from each other, we can still connect—through prayer, through a myriad of ways to communicate encouragement and hope and love...ways to offer those scale tipping small deeds that just change everything

The psalmist said, God is our safe place; we live in the shelter of the Most High. We also live in the shelter of each other. No disease can stop that. Our best defense is not fear but faith; not looking for the enemy but embracing *with all our heart*, the friend.

We will make it; we will be better together... and *we will be together again in one place*, and maybe, just maybe, we'll meet again soon with one heart...

All thanks be to God.