

**THE SIN OF SLOTH**  
**Fourth in a Sermon Series on the Seven Deadly Sins**  
**Peace in Christ Lutheran Church**  
**Walkersville, Maryland**  
**David E. Mueller, Interim Pastor**  
**Lent: March 14, 2007**

*“The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing, while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.” (Proverbs 13:4) “The lazy person buries a hand in a dish, and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth.” (Proverbs 26:15)*

Sloth, as the fourth deadly sin is the pivot of the seven. The word “sloth” does not appear in the Scriptures. I could get lazy and be done with it; lets go home early. Sloth is thought of as laziness and I had no other texts to draw from for reading at least. It might be helpful to note that the very first New Testament books written, Paul’s letters to Christians at Thessalonica, were in large part occasioned in response to a kind of laziness which had developed there. Some Christians, because Christ was soon to return, did not see fit to do much. With Christ coming soon, why work? To Paul this was abhorrent.

There were originally eight deadly sins. Pope Gregory the Great was one of those who trimmed the list to seven, most likely because of the holy character of the number seven, meaning “complete.” There were also seven “saving virtues” of which I will speak later in the series, and perhaps do a new series on this coming summer.

Included in the original eight sins were “tristitia” (melancholy) and “acedia” (apathy). When the list was trimmed to seven, tristitia and acedia were combined as “sloth,”

Developmental theorists, like Eric Erickson, tend to associate melancholy and apathy to the last stages of human development. “I do not care” (apathy) and “I cannot care” (melancholy) often happen to people whose physical and (or) mental functioning has become limited, sometimes in the extreme. “Generativity” is what life is all about, producing something vital, necessary, meaningful, useful. When that cannot or will not happen any longer, sloth can result, leaving the person with no desire or will to live. “Why am I still here?” “Why does the Lord not take me?” are common expressions.

I have often responded to those questions in pastoral settings by reminding people, including my own mother years back, that their major purpose in life may not yet have been fulfilled. It could be as simple as a few words of kindness to a staff person. Look at Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth. He came on the scene, did his appointed thing, in his case without speaking one recorded word, and then disappeared never to have been seen or heard about again. He fulfilled his purpose, which though rather simple and quick, was by no means insignificant. We can never be quite certain why we are here and what we yet are to do or say. We can frame these concerns as faith questions and be available to God for God’s purposes still to be realized.

At a deeper level, and, most typically, at an earlier or younger time, sloth can be a very real problem. I use sloth as part melancholy, part apathy. **I simply must add at this point that clinical depression, chemical imbalances in the brain, real grief, misfires of the spirit, and other conditions that cannot be controlled are not sin. Some things need to be treated medically, therapeutically, or pastorally.**

I would love to pronounce absolution and have these sorts of problems dissipate. For that matter, I would love to wave my hands in the Name of Jesus and have diseases heal. While there is a healing aspect to our Christian theology, much is not simple. It is not my or our role to make judgments on psychological, physiological, or psycho-physiological issues, as we may with sin. There are other considerations.

I am utterly intrigued that not all or even most economically deprived individuals turn to crime, nor do all politically oppressed people turn to terrorism, nor do most educationally ill-equipped people become non-productive or non-essential members of society. What does happen in so many cases? For that matter, why do so many economically, educationally, politically and otherwise advantaged people go wrong? Actually, the latter matter seems easier to answer even if the answer is insufficient to a complicated problem.

“More” is a “four-letter” word, which, along with “mine” can be as obscene as words get. The proud thinks MORE highly or MORE often of himself than he ought to. The envyer wants MORE and seldom settles for less. Even anger is grounded in some form or MORE. Pride, envy, anger cannot satisfy. Up to a point they feed on each other, producing some spoiled (think “deadly”) people who end up no longer able or willing to care. That’s sloth. Melancholy and apathy are often products of the previous sins. They can also be products of lives at any age, stage, advantage, or disadvantage when MORE is the point. We have not yet even mentioned, let alone studied greed, gluttony, or lust, which are still MORE about MORE.

Believing in God (wisdom) rather than not (foolishness), having a sense of positive regard for others, flowing from regard for oneself is what life is all about. It will have expressions of generativity, productivity, contributiveness and generosity. If MORE has value, it is in HOW CAN I GIVE MORE of my resources and self? **How can I get by with giving as little of myself and resources is sloth! Not taking time to think of how I am giving is the worst kind of sloth even for a person seemingly alive and well.**

Jesus came that we might have life abundantly (John 10). I need daily to be forgiven and sent on His way daily or risk slothfulness. Can I and do I truly care? Love and use me Lord!