

First Holiness, Now Love
Ephesians 5:1-9
The Third Sunday in Lent, March 4, 2018
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Last Sunday God spoke to us about holiness. He instructed us that fornication was opposed to holiness. He told us that fornication had to do with the things of death and because it had to do with the things of death it was unholy. He also instructed us that He has called us to holiness. Since He has called us to holiness we are holy. He imparts His holiness to us from the cross through the Sacrament of the Altar. Holy people do not commit fornication because holy people are holy.

Now God talks about love. Fornication is no more a part of love than it is a part of holiness. And to fornication God adds impurity and greed.

Since fornication is aimed at death and brings the status of death to those who engage in it, not only is it not holy. It is not love. You cannot commit fornication with your lover and tell them that you love them. If you loved them you would not be fornicating with them. Fornication aims at death for you and for the person with whom you are fornicating. God explained this to us last Sunday. To introduce the status of death with someone else is not to love them. In fact it harms them.

So also it is with any impurity. Any impurity are any of the things that still lead to death. Any action taken with or toward another that advances their death is impurity. One cannot be impure toward another or introduce an impurity to them while at the same time telling them that you love them. That is not love. It introduces harm. By introducing harm to their lives you are bringing about death in their lives. Impurity is incompatible with love.

So it is with greed. One cannot be greedy while at the same time loving those around him. There is the greed that harms the neighbor because the greed is directed against the neighbor. There is the greed that harms those who are used as excuses for the greed.

What I am talking about is your family. If you are greedy and desire more money, they are harmed by your desire for more money. They are harmed by your desire for a larger home, more land, more buildings, more equipment, more of the stuff and less of the life. They are harmed by the anger that comes with greed. They are harmed by the distraction that comes with greed. While you are pursuing the thing of which you are greedy, you are not pursuing them. And then obviously those who have lost things as a result of your greed, are harmed and you have introduced to them the things of death.

None of this is love. None of this is holiness. None of this is that to which you have been called. God's admonition to you is to imitate Him.

It is hard to imitate God unless He is visible. It is hard to imitate God unless He sets an example we can comprehend. He is the vast, eternal God. How can we see Him to imitate Him? How will we ever imitate Him in His acts of creation and in His acts of power? How will we ever imitate Him in His acts of prophecy and in His acts of judgment? We cannot imitate Him in these things unless He comes and gives us His example.

And that is why the Christ as He was was so necessary. The Christ is God and man in one Christ. God became human in the Christ. God became flesh in the Christ and the apostles beheld His glory. And through the apostolic testimony we behold His glory also. In the Christ God becomes visible.

It is supernatural and beyond comprehension. It is beyond human rationality to explain. The Christ was not alternating between being God and being man as if in one moment He is God and the next moment He is man. He does not do some things on the God side and other things on the man side. He is

always God and always man all of the time. Some things are of His divinity, like commanding wind and waves, and some things are of His humanity, like hungering and thirsting, but is always the whole Christ who does these things. There is not half a Christ who is God and half a Christ who is man. There is only one Christ. He is God and man.

This is why when the Christ is seated at table with His apostles, He is surprised when Thomas asks Him to show them the Father. Thomas was asking the Christ to show them God. Jesus reacts in surprise because they had already seen God. They had already seen the Father. They had seen Him. Jesus explained to them, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." But when the apostles looked at the Christ, He had a body like all men, but by looking at His body they were looking at God and by looking at God they were looking at the Father. The Christ is the exact imprint of the nature of the Father.

The end result is multifaceted, but one of the results is that God can now be imitated. We imitate God by imitating the Christ. The Christ loved us and gave Himself over on behalf of us as an offering and fragrant sacrifice to God. When it says that He was a fragrant sacrifice, that is a referenced to the Old Testament sacrifices which were shadows and outlines of the crucifixion of the Christ. God called the Old Testament sacrifices a soothing aroma. The aroma of the sacrifices soothed the wrath of God until the Christ came and when the Christ came He soothed the wrath of God permanently. He soothed God's wrath against us. This is why His death was an act of love on His part toward us. He was saving us by His death.

Therefore love is self sacrificing. This is the love that people who are called to God's holiness imitate. They imitate it because people who have been called in such a way have had their very being changed to be conformed to the likeness of the Christ. If their lives are conformed to the likeness of the Christ then they will love as He loved.

The love of Christ is not selfish. Therefore their lives are not selfish.

The only way to lead a selfless life is to lead a life free from idolatry.

Fornication is idolatry. It places the self above all other concerns.

Sexual unions are by God's design life bearing. That is why sexual unions bring such joy to those who engage in sexual unions. They bring such joy to those engaged in sexual unions because the couple who engages in a sexual union is sharing in the creating power of God. Since creation is by nature a joyful experience sexual unions are by nature a joyful experience.

Fornication as it is commonly practiced among us together with contraceptives thwarts the creative purpose and design of sexual unions, by thwarting the purpose of sexual unions the couple makes the union about themselves and not about God's creative purposes for sexual union. Therefore the couple is exalting themselves above God's design for sexual union. By exalting yourself above God's designs for sexual union you are making yourself gods. This is idolatrous.

Or to put it another way: if you are committing fornication with someone currently, why not get married? Why not marry the person with whom you are fornicating? One common answer is that we are not in the right financial situation in order to get married. If that is the case it only means that you think that you can use someone else for sexual pleasure for whom you are not in a position to care. That means that she is good enough to have sex with, but not good enough to care for. Young men of the congregation when you use another human being in that fashion for you own selfish pleasure you are trying to have dominance over her and be god over her and cruel and using god that you are. Not like the one true God and Christ who gives His life for His bride. You aren't even willing to give your life to this woman, but you will have sex with her.

Impurity is idolatry.

God defines impurity as anything that introduces death. In the Old Testament and in the New, impurity has to do with death. That is why the New Testament specifically takes the time both from the lips of our Lord and the vision received by Saint Peter to tell that the foods which were impure before the Christ are pure after Him. Without that specific instruction those things would have been impure. They are the things of death. And even though God now allows us to eat vultures and eagles and falcons and hawks, we have contented ourselves with merely eating pork.

In the New Testament the demons are unclean spirits. Those two words are used interchangeably. That means that anything demonic is impure. Impurity is that which leads to death. The demons desire your death above all things. They want to destroy you.

Impurity then would be anything that brings or advances death. To be impure advances your own death and the death of those around you. Advancing the death of those around you is an attempt to have power over their lives. By trying to coopt God and take power over someone else's life or your own life is idolatry. It is a great evil.

Greed is idolatry.

Greed is idolatry not only because it is directed against the things that your neighbor needs in order to survive and therefore it introduces death to your neighbor and is yet another example of the desire to have power over your neighbor's life and thus be god. But greed also reveals that we do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

It is not only the very rich who are greedy, but also the very poor. Anyone can be greedy no matter what their economic situation, just as anyone can be content no matter what their economic situation. *The Honeyymooners* had great success in comedy on the premise that the poor are greedy.

If a person has an unexpected expense and loses his temper because he does not think that he has the resources to pay for the unexpected expense, he reveals that he is greedy. He trusts in money and not in God. If He trusted in God, he would believe God when God tells him, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." But because the man does not trust in God, but rather trusts in his money to save him and take care of him, when he does not have enough money to do those things, he becomes angry.

If a person has an unexpected expense and they become angry, not because they cannot pay it, but rather because they had plans for that money to do something else with it, then they demonstrate that they love money. They expect to be able to spend what they get on their pleasures.

If a person fears the loss of money, they trust in money more than they trust in God. If they are overjoyed by the increase of wealth and fail to thank God for it, they love money more than they love God.

This is idolatry.

Idolatry is the chief sin. There is no greater sin than idolatry. Therefore if anyone is a fornicator, impure, or greedy, that person has no inheritance in the Kingdom of the Christ or of God.

Do not be deceived by vain words.

The universe was created by the Word of the Lord. Therefore the Word of the Lord gives life. It creates life. It bestows life. It bestows everything which is good. It does nothing that is bad. When the Lord speaks His word everything works the way that it should.

That is why in the creation God spoke and it came to be. He uttered His voice and it stood firm. That is why the prophecies of the Lord in regards to our salvation came to pass. That is why Jesus commanded the lame to walk and they did. He commanded the blind to see and they did. He commanded the impure to be pure and they were. He commanded the grieving to quit grieving and they did when He commanded the dead to live and they lived.

This is the good word of the Lord. It contravenes death and bestows life.

Any other word therefore is vain. It is of death. And because of vain words the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. The sons of disobedience, the fornicator, the impure, the greedy have all listened and believed vain words. They have heard and believed words that did not come from God. Words that do not come from God come from the serpent.

In the Garden, besides Adam and Eve there were only two things that spoke: God and the serpent. Therefore there was only God's word and the serpent's word to believe. God's word creates life. The serpent's word brings death and He is a murderer from the beginning. The serpent's word is a vain word. It cannot bring life. It can only fowl and mess up the good word that the Lord spoke and thus bring death. With death comes disobedience.

Therefore you who have called to live lives of holiness and love do not be fellow partakers with vain words. Nor be fellow partakers with those who spread vain words.

Folks, vain words are everywhere. They are in our classrooms in our schools. They are in our pulpits, which is why I have to confess the sins of myself and of my fellow preachers so that you may be able to distinguish between the vain words that you hear from the pulpit and the word of God which you hear from the pulpit. Vain words are on the TV, internet, publications of all kinds. Vain words are in our minds and in our hearts. We speak them to each other and to our children. They are not of God and the only way to tell the difference is to listen to God.

Vain words bring death. Vain words try to justify fornication, impurity, and greed. That is why vain words bring death. They bring death to the sons of disobedience who listen to them and to those around them. Impurity spreads. It always has.

Or to put this all another way, this is all darkness. Darkness brings death with it. Light brings life with it. You are not children of the darkness. You are children of the light. You are light in the Lord. Walk about as children of the light.

And the fruit of the light is goodness, righteousness and truth.

It is goodness which is the functionality that brings life to yourself and others.

It is righteousness, not that you are merely declared righteous, but that the creator God declared you righteous and therefore you are righteous in your very being and thus not disobedient.

It is truth. It is truth about fornication, impurity, and greed. And it is the truth about the love of God in Christ Jesus. And in that truth there is love for love rejoices in the truth.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.