

“The Healing of Withdrawal”
Lenten Service, March 10, 2010
Pastor Tim Eighmy

Please read Bible text: Mathew 26:69-75

In Roman Catholic theology, there is the doctrine of the Seven Deadly Sins. One of those sins is ‘sloth’ or sometimes called ‘laziness’. Actually the translation from the Latin is ‘apathy’ – the lack of will to do anything.

Apathy is when people just don’t care anymore. Maybe they once did, but their disappointment with the struggles of life has become so great that it is just less painful not to care anymore.

I’ve seen teenagers who go to Bible camps every year throughout their childhood, become increasingly less enthusiastic about going again. They know they will have a great time and meet new friends, but at the end of the week they will have to say good-bye. This is painful. So they don’t want to go to camp anymore.

I’ve seen church congregations get enthusiastic about doing an evangelism program. They give time and build excitement getting ready. Then when the event comes, there are not as many people as

they hoped would attend. After being disappointed, people just don't want to get that excited again about the next program.

I've seen people get involved in advocacy for peace issues or various types of justice issues. They are so impassioned about it and work so hard for their causes. But after several setbacks and after much frustration over how the rest of the world isn't as impassioned as they are, eventually they burn out and have to step away from their advocacy work.

I see withdrawal from relationships. We may try hard to resolve an issue or face a difficulty. But if nothing gets resolved, it becomes easier to stop trying and deny that there is a problem in the first place.

In abusive relationships, it is easier – and sometimes safer – to deny that anybody is really getting abused. When there is an addiction in our lives, it is often easier to deny that there is a problem than to go through the heart-wrenching work of trying face up to and control the addiction.

As an observer, it is so much easier to say, “No problem,” than to face the problem. Even if facing the problem will bring about more good than harm, it is easier just to avoid it and withdraw from helping others.

It can hurt and it can get complicated helping others.

When we hear the story of how Peter denied being a disciple when Jesus was arrested and put on trial, we often have two different reactions as Christians.

The first reaction may be, “Isn’t that awful. How can anybody do that to the Christ whom they followed? I would never do anything like that.”

Really? You are not like that?

How often do you avoid sharing your faith with someone?

How often do you avoid volunteering to do something that you know would be of service to others?

You don’t think that the resurrected Jesus is here now—whom we’re avoiding or withdrawing from? Some of us might recognize ourselves in the story of Peter.

I can understand how I might deny Jesus too—if I was terrified that I would be treated like Jesus was, if I was married and had a family like Peter did. Wouldn’t I place the safety of my family above serving Jesus?

Or maybe Peter really didn't believe things were as bad as they were. Maybe he thought that Jesus was going to get off and beat the system somehow. Maybe he thought the angels would come down and destroy the powers of the world and Jesus would reign as king very soon.

Or maybe he just didn't want to think about it at all. Maybe he just wanted to survive the next few hours and next few days no matter what it took.

Wouldn't we do something like that?

But then, this is exactly why Christ died for us. This is the reality of our sin.

In his resurrection, Jesus did forgive Peter. And Peter became the leader of the apostles in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Eventually, Peter would die on a cross as well, for his faith in Jesus Christ.

In the same way we are forgiven and we have the same Holy Spirit in our lives who led Peter in his ministry.

We too are called to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Christ. That is, we are called to go out of our way to do what we can—to share God's love with everyone we meet.

We can be tired and we can be scared and feel incompetent in sharing our faith and doing what's best for others. But with Christ in our lives, we know we don't need to give up on ourselves. Christ still has work for us to do as the church and as Christians.

Amen.