

Pentecost 18, 2009 = October 4  
Good Hope Lutheran Church

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Okay, there's sin; *and then there's sin!* And then there are those things which are so terribly sinful, we don't even know what to say about them, on a scale of 1 to 10, these things are a 9 and a half! A 10 even! Wow. That's pretty bad, today we dare to ask the question, What is, the worst sin, in the world.

What is the worst sin in the world, well in the Old Testament, God spent a lot of time listing out those actions and activities that He in His infinite wisdom considered sinful. Books like Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy are filled with laws, given by God; laws given by God and meant to be taken very seriously. How to deal with mildew in your house. Foods that may or may not be eaten. Sexual idiosyncrasies too—we'll get to that in a minute, but break any of these Bible laws—and it's sin. Well, we have come to understand that some of these laws may have been culturally conditioned, they may have been appropriate for the year 1000 BC but today we deal with mildew in a completely different way, for instance, and honestly we don't consider it sinful. Certainly we wouldn't consider it, *the worst sin in the world.*

But those are just Old Testament *laws*; they're not the Commandments, are they? The 10 Commandments I mean—found in Exodus 20 as well as Deuteronomy 5, I think the Bible is sufficiently plain, the Commandments are different. While laws may come and go, the Commandments are forever. While some laws make sense here and now and other laws made sense then and there, the commandments are eternal!—so breaking a commandment, would be more serious, right? Right? Seems safe to say. So what are the 10 Commandments?—please notice, one of them is NOT, Thou shalt not be openly gay. Can't find it there, can you? Thou shalt not be a practicing homosexual—no commandment says that, a few laws do—no commandment. The commandments DO say, Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. The commandments DO say, Don't take God's name in vain. What does this mean, well if we are in fact looking for *the worst sin in*

*the world* and if we are in fact using the Bible as our guide, then might it not mean that skipping church every week is worse than homosexuality?

Cussing a blue streak when the Buckeyes lose, is worse than homosexuality?—those are the commandments, folks. And when it comes to things like church attendance, for example, we have to admit that we can be pretty sloppy. Sorry if I offend anyone here, but you know it's true. And that is still a commandment—not merely a law like mildew or food or a sexual idiosyncrasy. A commandment.

“Ok Pastor, ok. But the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment forbids adultery. And we've always understood that to mean, God commands sexual purity in general; so doesn't that mean the commandments really do forbid homosexuality?” You know, I might let you say that. I might be inclined to agree, the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment is, *stretchable*. It includes not only the specific act of adultery but also enjoins sexual purity in general, so yes, I agree, you can read homosexuality into the commandments, it could well be forbidden there. I agree. But then what about the jokes we tell, and the stories we like to repeat? The 8<sup>th</sup> commandments says Don't bear false witness, doesn't that stretch to include a lot of what we let slide in daily conversation, a lot of what we think is, funny? The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment says don't kill, well if it's wrong to kill isn't it wrong to be entertained by killing? But if our kids want to go to “Nightmare on Elm Street part 16, Freddie stacks 'em higher and deeper,” don't we just give them 10 bucks and say Here, go have fun? How is homosexuality any worse than habits like that, habits which we have and frankly ignore, I'm just asking for some perspective here. Based on the Bible—how do you get homosexuality to be a nine and a half, maybe a ten, and this other stuff doesn't even count? It doesn't even register!

“Hold it pastor, stop. Back to those laws that talk about homosexuality—ok, they're only laws, not commandments; and they're in there with other laws about mildew and what not, but I've read those laws about homosexuality, pastor. Leviticus 18: 22, I've read that law! It says homosexuality is an abomination. That's pretty bad, isn't it? An abomination!” It does say that, homosexuality is an abomination. Proverbs 11.1, using dishonest scales in business dealings, is an abomination. Proverbs 12.22, telling a lie, is an abomination. Proverbs 16.5, being proud and arrogant, is an abomination, the word abomination singular appears 71 times in the Old Testament, maybe two or three times referring to homosexuality. The other times it refers to stuff that we do, *we* do it, now how is homosexuality the worst sin in the world? How do we, based on the

Bible. Based on the Bible, how do we make it a nine and a half, a ten, and that other stuff seems so ordinary to us, so routine and less serious? I'm just asking for some perspective here, all I'm saying is, find it in the book.

In the book, if you look, there are maybe a half dozen references to homosexuality—all of them negative. All of them negative, I haven't gone soft on you here, I just want some perspective—but all half dozen Bible references to homosexuality are in fact negative. Do you know how many references there are in the Bible to taking care of the poor? Do you know how many times God says He is offended, by how the wealthy can stand by and let others go hungry? References to God's displeasure with homosexuality—six or seven. References to God's displeasure with tolerating poverty?—2,100. I didn't count them, somebody else did, 2,100. Now I know you give money to hunger relief causes, I know you do, but do you realize how central this theme is to the Bible? Do you understand how easily we forget people God does not want us to forget! And yes, some of the poor got that way because of their own foolishness. Yes, some people are poor, and it's their own fault; some people are poor, and crooked too. Not as many as you might think, but it's true. You think God doesn't know that? You think you could say "Lord, I don't need to help those poor people over there, cause it's their own fault they're poor and anyway some of them might not be honest," you think God's going to say "Oh my goodness I did not know that! For heaven's sake keep your money and don't share anything with them, I'm sorry I bothered you with this," you think God doesn't know the score? He told you to be relentless in helping the poor and hungry anyway, and He did so 2,100 times. Compared to six or seven passages about homosexuality, which—which is the more serious.

I will tell you what the worst sin in the world is. There is one, in my opinion. Ready? The worst sin in the world is the one you will not repent. The worst sin in the world is the one you have gotten comfortable with, and will not let go. The worst sin in the world is the one you know you will commit again tomorrow, maybe on purpose!—and you know that, even sitting here, in church.

In the eyes of many, right now in our beloved ELCA, the worst sin in the world is accepting, tolerating, promoting—openly gay lifestyles. It is contradicted by Scripture, and by 2000 years of church tradition; it is kept and not repented, held and not released, according to *my* definition here this morning you could easily say, for the ELCA this is indeed, the worst sin in

the world. If I hesitate to say that. If I hesitate it's because I know there a lot of people who realize they are gay and who struggle to be Christian, and I don't want to chase them out of the one place where they ought to be able to find genuine compassion and support. But let's say you're right. Let's say that in the ELCA this is, the worst sin in the world, then what is our Christian duty? What is our Christian duty? Our *duty*, not a choice, not an option, our *duty*—is to politely kindly respectfully persistently consistently tirelessly repeatedly and lovingly—point this out. And, work for reform. Jesus hasn't given up on you, we can't give up on the people Jesus loves, we can't. We have a duty. Leaving. Quitting. That's what the disciples did to Jesus in the garden. Shame on anyone for even thinking it.

Our duty is to work for reform, to preach repentance—actually, that's our *second* duty. The first is to identify the worst sin in your life personally. You know what it is right now, I bet—it's the one you won't repent. It's the one you don't even want to talk about. It's the one you hope God will forgive, even though you have absolutely no intention whatsoever of ever actually changing. You need to change. You need to repent. Then and only then, speaking the truth in love, do we talk to the ELCA as a whole.

Last point: in a conflict like this one, this sexuality thing, we all want so badly, to be right. I think that's why there are 23000 Protestant denominations in this country, each one of us just has to be right. Folks, I don't care very much if I'm right. On the day of judgment, when it's my turn to stand before our crucified King, I don't think I'm going to want to stand there and say "You know what? Back in October of 2009, I was right!" Bad. Idea. Better to stand there and say "Lord? I tried to be helpful. There were people then who had lost their way, and as one sinner to another I tried to be helpful." How about you? Would you rather be right, or helpful? Remember Jesus Christ, who by definition is always right! He put that aside, He left heaven behind, He gave up being merely right to live with sinners, and to take their sin upon Himself, to take their sin and make it His own so to speak; and to die for them. To die for you. So here in this place, let's do what Jesus did. In meekness of spirit, let's go to other sinners, and show them the way back, and then walk that way with them.

May we do so, all of us, and may God have mercy on each and every one. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.