

Recycling Sloth
Prov 6:6-11, John 7:37-38,

Friends let me introduce you to the Sloth family this morning. This is Uncle Bob and he's a typical Sloth. Bob doesn't like to put much effort into anything, he's not motivated to do much, and he has very few ambitions in life, except perhaps to kick back and take it easy.

Bob does have a natural knack for mechanical work but hasn't done anything with it because it requires too much effort and commitment to go and study further to get certified.

As you can probably guess Bob has trouble holding down a steady job because he is lazy and not very reliable. He is frequently moving from one place to the next mooching off his friends and family and church to help him get by when he isn't able to qualify for welfare.

On the occasions when Bob attends church, which usually happens whenever he needs some extra help, he likes to go

somewhere where they give good handouts and don't ask too many questions or try to get involved in your life.

A classic sloth if there ever was one, and certainly someone whom we would say should read, and heed, the advice in Proverbs 6:6 about being lazy and being destroyed by poverty.

Uncle Bob, the sluggard could certainly learn a couple of lessons from the Ant.

But... there are more members of the Sloth family, and they aren't exactly what you might expect.

This is Alex, Bob's younger brother; he had a talent for making money – an eye for business opportunities. In fact when he was fourteen he had already started his own lawn mowing and snow shoveling operation in his neighborhood and had four of the neighborhood kids working for him.

He studied business in university and after he graduated he raised enough capital to purchase a Tim Horton's franchise.

It's been a runaway success and he now owns three additional locations.

But it demands a great deal of Alex's time and energy to stay on top of it all and so on the weekends when he doesn't have to work, Alex likes to get away from it all at his "cottage" and just relax with his wife and kids.

And on the occasions when Alex attends church, which between the demands of work and the times he needs to get away are few... and far between - usually just Christmas and Easter plus a couple other Sundays.

So he's happy to go to the little country church that he grew up in, just a short drive outside the city, where nothing ever changes and no one ever wonders why they haven't seen him for six months.

Not what you'd typically expect from a sloth friends, but a sloth nonetheless...

And Alex's wife Janice is also a Sloth. Since Alex is gone so much of the time Janice is very involved in their little country church.

She helps to organize bake sales and other fundraising efforts; she takes care of the church's flower gardens in the summer, visits the seniors in the nursing home, and is her church's representative on the multi-faith initiative committee for their city.

She really likes their church because as she says "the minister makes it really easy to be a Christian, she doesn't get all hung up on taking the bible too seriously or talking about sin... its just positive and inspirational – I feel like I can be a normal person just like everyone else"

So that's the Sloth family friends. Maybe you know them... maybe they remind you of someone, maybe you can relate to them a little bit.

Because friends, as a deadly sin Sloth is all about how much physical energy, effort and discipline you are willing to put into pursuing your relationship with God.

It's kind of obvious that a lazy person is probably not going to put much effort into it, but we don't necessarily have to be lazy people to neglect our relationship with God do we?

We might not put very much effort or energy into it because we're too busy, because we have skewed our priorities, because we're afraid of what others might think or say about us,

because we don't want to be seen as "radical..." because we realize that if our relationship with God grows, He will expect more from us, it will take us out of our comfort zone...

or perhaps we just believe that ***genuine*** spiritual growth is just something that happens only on its own, that if we've somehow worked at achieving it, then because it's our effort we're not really experiencing God...

Whatever the reason friends when we neglect to put energy and effort and discipline into our relationship with God and we allow ourselves to plateau and stagnate... we are being Sloths.

Now at this point, having been made aware of our tendency to neglect and avoid working on our relationship with God – we would typically expect to be told "to stop neglecting it" and "start working on it"

Which works about as well as telling Uncle Bob he should go and read Proverbs 6:6-11 take a lesson from the ant, stop being lazy and go and get a job –right?

How many people do you know who stopped being lazy and started working hard because all they needed to be told was "get a job you bum!"

And how many Christians do you know who know have a vibrant relationship with God because all they needed to hear was "start working on your relationship with God!"

Rhetorical questions obviously...

Instead, as we've been doing with all the deadly sins, we want to ask "what good thing is sin twisting and warping in this instance that produces sloth?"

Well friends do you remember what God did on the seventh day? After he spent six days creating, on the seventh day He rested...

And He built that pattern of working and then resting into the very fabric of our world, that's why when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments He said...

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God." (Ex 20:8-10)

And in other parts of the Law God commanded that *"in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the LORD." (Ex 25:4)*

And Jesus reiterates this creational principle in the New Testament when he says *"The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath"* (Mark 2:27) and in his actions as he *"often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."* (Luke 5:16)

So friends, when Sin twists and warps that inherent pattern and need that we have for rest and renewal... it produces sloth.

But the good news is that when we deal with our sloth from a "recycling" approach by invoking the transforming and redeeming power of the Holy Spirit we can begin to address and pursue our need for renewal as opposed to being slothful...

And I can't find a better description of what God's intention of renewing us is like than what Jesus says *"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* (John 7:38)

Friends, when was the last time you felt like you had streams of living water flowing out of you?

What an amazing metaphor to describe what it's like to have the all energy, the health, the joy, or whatever it might be that you need to get motivated and expend in pursuit of whatever work God has given you to do in His world!

Friends, wouldn't you like to experience not just receiving living water... but having it flow out from within you?

And not just a small stream like one of those wimpy little water fountain, but a cascade of clean, clear, ice cold refreshing water like Elbow Falls - just gushing out of you? Lord I would like that!

Now maybe we're sitting here this morning listening to this saying "well... I believe in Jesus, but I'm not feeling like living water is flowing out of me, not even a little wimpy water fountain... I'm tired and drained and I feel spent!"

Friends I hear you – I sympathize with you and I can relate as well... and this illustrates the truth of the matter that we need renewal... on a regular basis.

But I have to warn you friends, obtaining renewal through "believing" in Jesus is not a simplistic, formulaic matter.

If you are feeling drained you can't just attend worship one Sunday and come away with living water sloshing all around inside you, feeling renewed. (Though God can do miracles)

You see friends; Jesus had some other things to say about believing in Him that we need to be aware of.

He also said *"When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me."* (John 12:44)

and when *"the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things... and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* (John 15:26)

So... believing in Jesus is also about believing in the Father and in the Holy Spirit, and I think we instinctively know that this “belief” involves far more than simply admitting to the fact that the Triune God is real and He exists.

Believing means trusting, obeying, honoring, listening, following, worshiping, giving, and a whole bunch of other very practical verbs... in our relationship with each person of the Trinity - Creator, Savior, and Sanctifying Spirit.

But verbs mean action, effort, energy and this is why Sloth is so tempting; it will give us more immediate results for a great deal less effort.

Will you feel somewhat recharged and refreshed after you get away to Canmore for a week-end of just doing nothing? Pretty Sure.

Will you be ready to face another week at work after spending Sunday afternoon at the spa with your friends? Quite possibly.

Will you be entertained and energized by spending your evenings couching it and watching TV and playing video games? Most likely.

But think of how quickly that effect wears off once you get back into the daily grind friends, it’s not even Wednesday before you’re already thinking of your next getaway to help you make it through the week...

Now none of these or any other relaxing activities are necessarily bad friends – in fact in and of themselves they are good gifts from God, but let’s remember...they are no substitute for God.

Someone once asked a renowned artist how they managed to stay so creative? The answer that came back was “I spend time with the Creator.”

And that is the kicker friends – the amount of living water that will flow out of us, the amount of renewal we will experience,

will be directly related to the amount of time that we spend with God.

Now the good news is friends that we don't need to experience this as an either/or situation.

It doesn't have to be - either I spend time with God, or I spend time relaxing in the mountains, either I sit down and read my bible or I go see a movie, either I go to church or I take some quiet time for myself...

Now don't misunderstand me here, I'm not trying to soften the requirements and make it easier to accommodate our sloth... I'm not saying that renewal doesn't take energy, effort, discipline and sacrifice...

What I'm getting at friends is that there are opportunities to spend time with God all around us. We have the chance to put in the effort to develop our relationship with the Triune God in all that we do and wherever we are!

And once we are aware of this and we begin to do it, gradually over time we will experience renewal - remember Isaiah 40:31 *"those who **wait**...Upon the Lord shall **renew** their strength..."* Renewal doesn't happen instantaneously!

As we experience this renewal we will discover we don't necessarily need to get away so often, we don't need to rest up as much, we have more to give... more time more energy and we can take that and re-invest it into the Body of Christ.

And at this point it will be like experiencing something similar to the effect of investing all the compound interest of a high yielding investment back into it - and seeing that exponential growth.... Streams, torrents of living water gushing out of your inner being!

Sounds good doesn't it? But what are the first steps that we need to take towards this?

First admit your slothfulness – whatever form or shape it takes for you, admit it and confess it to Christ and ask for his forgiveness and ask for the Holy Spirit to recycle it.

Next you'll need to put in some hard work to learn and discover how you can experience God in your everyday life.

Then for a while you will need to be very intentional about pursuing those opportunities where you very much experience God in a regular and consistent manner.

Once you've begun to benefit and experience renewal from those regular encounters with God, you are in a safe place where you can begin to branch out and begin to learn to experience Him in activities and situations and places where you wouldn't have expected to before.

Friends this is the path and the pattern of renewal which God has laid out for us.

Maybe you've already got a good idea as to how you can move ahead on it, but if you're wondering "what can I do to put those first steps into action?"

Friends, I want to invite you to do something today – after church in the foyer there is a sign-up sheet for a course I'm offering that will assist you in doing exactly what we've talked about this morning – after the service... sign up!

Some of you have gone through this course this in your Christ Care groups already, some are doing it now and some will be doing it in the near future – but not everyone is part of a Christ Care group, and so I'm going to be offering it to those who are interested...

And that's my prayer this morning friends, that the Holy Spirit will have piqued our interested this morning.

And that our interest will lead to action. That when we leave here this morning we will actually go and specifically ***do something*** to start recycling the deadly sin of Sloth...

Friends recycling Sloth can't happen any other way – you can't just say “wow good message on sloth...” you can't go home and continue to think about it... you can't wait to feel motivated and you certainly can't put it off – that's just being Slothful again.

So friends, what is the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit calling you to do this morning to recycle our sloth and experience Renewal instead!

Let's pray...