

**Sermon Series: Love and Let Live    “Contamination Free Zone”**  
**Mark 7:14-23; James 1:19-27; Psalm 5:1-8a, 11-12**  
**Salem United Methodist Church**  
**September 7, 2014**  
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In 1972 Paul McCartney was commissioned to write a song for the James Bond movie, “Live and Let Die.” The song begins with these universal words of truth, “When you were young and your heart was an open book, you used to say live and let live, But if this ever-changing world in which we're livin' makes you give in and cry, say “Live and Let Die.” This sermon series will explore what makes us give in and cry, “Live and Let Die” and not, “Love and Let Live.”

Pollution and contamination are ubiquitous. They can be found in just about everything, everywhere. Pollution is as ancient as humans. For instance, soot is found in prehistoric caves from the lack of ventilation from open fires. The burning of coal was banned in London in 1272 because of the amount of smoke it produced. Today we can find contaminants in our water, air, soil. These are chemicals produced by different kinds of waste. In addition, there is noise pollution created by motors of all kinds, and visual pollution from over illumination to anything that disrupts a landscape. And then, of course, we have littering of garbage and debris that is not disposed of properly. The waste from the use of our resources and commodities is difficult if not impossible to avoid. This is not a sermon on ecology, although God instructs us to care for God’s creation. This is a sermon about what pollutes our hearts, what contaminates our souls, and in so doing tears down and discourages rather than builds up and encourages.

Jesus was well aware that humans are contaminated, and not just physically. The religious law was set up to fuse together physical and spiritual cleanliness. At the time this included strict ordinances about which foods were considered clean to eat and the ritualistic washing of hands. Both were ways in which one honored God and became holy. There may have even been some health and hygienic reasoning behind these laws in a culture that had no refrigeration and water was not ubiquitous. Today we know that washing hands removes germs and prevents illness. However, Jesus and his disciples who were constantly on the move did not have the luxury of washing their hands every time they ate. They ate what they could find and washed when they could, thus received the criticism of the religious authorities. Jesus counters this criticism with some realistic images in which everyone can relate. Who hasn’t experienced vomit or “what works its way through the intestines?” Yes, Jesus uses human excrement as an illustration! He states that our true pollution is not what we eat, but what is in our hearts. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* coins the phrase as “vomit from the heart.”

Have you ever smelled vomit? It stinks, right? It is sour and rank. Vomit is gross looking. Sometimes just being in the presence of vomit can make another vomit, right? Sometimes just hearing someone vomit can churn one’s stomach. Well, what does “vomit from the heart” look like, smell like, sound like? It is all things evil. The Greek word for evil is *sapros*, and it refers to rotten food. It describes anything overripe or putrid. *Sapros*, also means useless, corrupt, and depraved, of poor or bad quality. Evil contaminates, pollutes, and destroys. Just like expelled stomach contents, this evil comes out of us. Words and actions intent on destroying, hurting, damaging, demolishing, and even annihilating are “vomit from the heart.” Jesus lists thirteen of them. Today we will look at two: obscenity and depravity. First is obscenity. The New Revised Version uses the word, lascivious which means foul, crude, trashy. Lascivious or obscene words tear down another intentionally. It is more than breaking the second commandment of taking God’s name in vain. It is evil talk! It is intentionally saying things that will harm another, tear down another. All of us have vomited up obscenities. And all of us have been on the receiving end of words that attempt to tear us down. Another word akin to obscenity is slander. Children can be so harsh to someone who is different from them-adults, too. There is name calling, talking behind the person’s back, spreading false information, starting rumors, and gossiping. Today social media adds another whole level to obscene, lascivious language. The world is full of tweets, anonymous comment boards, and 24 hour news cycle that attack us with speech that is belittling and contentious. They create a large contamination zone. These attacks can be personal. People who struggle with self-esteem, who do not feel loved are destroyed by these words. Some even commit suicide. If one is already feeling unloved and useless, being called names only intensifies the feelings of unworthiness. And these hate filled words stay with us for a lifetime. What tape plays in your head from words that have been inflicted on you by others? How do

you react to the pain that has been inflicted on you? Do you vomit it out onto someone else to inflict your pain on another? Or do you allow it to eat away at your very core? Stop it. There is another way. Talk to someone who you trust about it. Know that Jesus loves you and is within you. You are worthy and important to God.

The second word to examine is depravity. The New Revised Standard Version uses the word, “wickedness.” They essentially mean the same thing. Depravity is an evil way of behaving. Wickedness can be defined as morally bad or evil. Both are intentional actions that hurt others. These actions are everywhere. We hear or read about them in Iraq, the Middle East, the Ukraine, in Ferguson, Missouri, and wonder, “How can evil be stopped?” This is not a new question. Evil has been present since Cain killed Abel out of jealousy. Each generation seems to have to deal with the question of evil. It raises its ugly head over and over again. We see it when one group detests another and does everything in its power to annihilate them. Can one overcome evil with good as John Wesley proposed? Or does one fight evil with evil until hopefully the latter evil destroys the former evil? Can evil like a cancer be cut out and destroyed? Is war ever just? Is killing ever warranted? These are ethical and moral questions that each of us struggle to answer. Does loving my neighbor who is mean and wicked ever mean destroying my neighbor? No matter how one looks at this, it is all vomit from the heart: vile, disgusting, foul pollution or contamination. No one is immune. We all suffer from the same illness.

We say things and do things that are unloving and destroy life. That life can be both the actual presence of life, or the living of a life. Words and actions can destroy both our existence and how we exist. Ever open a feather pillow and shake it out a window? One cannot collect all those feathers and put them back in the pillow again. What has been said cannot be taken back. What has been done cannot be undone. But there is hope. Thanks be to God! James gives us direction. Back in the time of James Christians were being ostracized and persecuted for their faith. Today Christians are, too. Do we fight back showing our power and strength? James didn’t think so. Our power is different from the world’s power. Our power lies within us. As James states, “the word [is] planted deep inside” us, deep in our hearts. The Word of God made real in Jesus is like a Pepto Bismol for our hearts. However, it doesn’t just coat or soothe our pain; it transforms it and saves us. The Word of God can’t just rest in us, but grows in us until we can act on it. We can’t just hear the Word of God. We have to act on it. As James so poignantly states, “You must be doers of the word and not only hearers.” Those who just hear the Word will forget it, and walk away from it. James states that “Their devotion is worthless.” Those who put the Word of God into practice will keep the world from being contaminated.

Each of us needs to confront the evil within both the words that we say that tear down and the actions we do that destroy others. We need to adhere to a contamination free zone, not contribute to the contamination. Stop listening to or watching social and/or political media that tears down and destroys another. Read, watch, and listen to that which helps the Word of God grow within you. Take Five and meditate. Focus on God not evil. Richard Rohr writes, that the “Presence of God is in yourself and beyond yourself...It is not just an idea of the mind. The mind can only reprocess the past, judge the present, and worry about the future.” Our minds can really stir up the nausea in our hearts until we vomit evil. Rohr continues that spending time alone with God in meditation will “teach you how to move from an egocentric, fear-based life to a love based life.” God created our hearts to be open to love and let live. When we do not “set aside all moral filth and the growth of wickedness,” as James stated, we will give in, and not only say, “Live and Let Die,” as Paul McCartney wrote, but we will act on these words. We will be not only be hearers of the vile, contaminated words of the world, but we will be doers of them as well.

All the hate and evil there is in the world can be overwhelming and leave us with a feeling of helplessness. Even if we are in positions in which we may be able to have impact the evil in the world, we may still feel powerless. But, we do have the power of prayer. Rather than tear down our leaders, pray for them as they make decisions to overcome evil in the world. Our history tells us that evil can be defeated. Good can overcome evil. God is more powerful than all the evil man can vomit. So claim that power. Be not just hearers of God’s Word. Be doers of it as well.

**Reflection Questions:** How do you keep our world’s barrage of negativity from contaminating you? What do you do to hear God’s Word? And how are you a doer of God’s Word?

**Resources:** <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/paulmccartney/liveandletdie.html>; Church of the Resurrection Sermon Series: “The Power of Words,” [www.cor.org](http://www.cor.org); Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation, Sept 5, 2014, “God is Not ‘Out There.’”

