



Transcript: Seven Deadly Sins: Pride – Rev. Dr. Dennis Perry

How are you? I'm glad to see you on this Spring Forward Sunday. A lot of us are at Kingstown now, and I'm happy for the support of the project and all the people that are there. Seven years ago I was reading the Washington Post, and saw that 60,000 people were going to be moving into the Belvoir area. I thought there wasn't any large church to service that number of people who will be looking for a church. None of the existing churches could accommodate such an influx of people.

It occurred to me that it would be a good idea if we had a church there. I took the idea to the Bishop of Virginia and District leaders. I brought it to the congregational leaders and you its members. For seven years we've been discerning, and thinking, and praying, and reading, and figuring out what to do. Last spring we said "Let's go". Since May we have been putting together teams of people, and checking the community and offering a Christmas Eve services at a firehouse, offered a chance to work with Stop Hunger Now and packaged 10,000 meals.

With the goal being to have this thing launch today, Jason is there and he told me that his first sermon at Kingstown would reference one of the first sermons he heard me preach when he was about 16 years old. He was part of my congregation in Richmond. It's a unique gift, that I have to tolerate him now still. I then told [Hetty Culver 00:01:37] who is on our staff and a marvelous addition to the church. It's like we have this aching and waiting for her to show up, and when she arrive, she's the perfect fit. I didn't know she was missing until she got here, and now I can't imagine this church without her. I asked her, I said "Whatever you want to do, just make sure you're here on March 9." Because that's when we're going to launch, and I need all hands on deck that day. She is now in New York with her husband and they're celebrating her husband's mothers' 70th birthday.

When you see Hetty, tell her she bailed, when we needed her the most. Months ago we chose series of sermons. We do it about 6 to 9 months ahead, to give time the music team and everybody else to get ready. Jason proposed this one, and he gets to do Kingstown, Hetty gets to be at a party and I get to do Seven Deadly Sins. You would think, if you open a book that call Seven Deadly Sins, How to Sin like a Christian by Will Willimon.

If we are going to study THE 7 deadly sins they would be, well, deadly serious. They would say something about global warming and the end of the planet as we know it. Gang violence, terrorism, but what do we get instead? You get pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth. They don't sound like the Seven Deadly Sins, it's sounds like an advertisement for a reality TV show on Fox. Pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth. They just seem so tiny.

They seem barely worth our attention. They just seem so small. If any of you were alive in 1980, there was a guy named Carl Sagan who did a series on PPS called Cosmos. He took us on a voyage to see the magnificence of the galaxies and the universe. It's going to be redone,



his wife overseeing it, with a new guide for the journey, Neil deGrasse Tyson who lead us on the next voyage through the Cosmos.

I'm just wondering if he's going to say "Billions and billions of stars," or "that we are made of stardust." That was Carl's line. My reaction to watching the Cosmos was to feel incredibly small. That there were billions, and billions of stars. And from the perspective of the universe, or the multi-verses I was nothing.

From that perspective this whole little blue ball could evaporate and it wouldn't make any difference. Knowing that, how do you take seriously anything that we do. How does it take on meaning, the Seven Deadly Sins written by Will Willimon. Will Willimon was a professor at Duke Divinity School who went on to become a bishop in the North Alabama conference where he was bishop for eight years.

He retired from being bishop, and is now the pastor of the United Methodist Church near Durham, near Duke Durham University. We've invited him to come be our guest speaker at the end of March. Will has written over 60 books and it is one of the most popular writers in all of Christendom. If you want to know what's going on with Protestant Christianity in America, there is nobody better positioned to answer your questions than Will Willimon.

If you want to know what the grace of Jesus Christ is like, Will can introduce you and tell you. He's a magnificent guy, he'll be here the last weekend in March, he'll be at all of our services I hope you'll mark it on your calendar, bring your friends. Will is worth the price of admittance.

I want to talk about the Seven Deadly Sins. There was a Greek Philosopher name [Avirgress 00:05:12 who came up with his list of the deadly sins. Pope Gregory perfected it, St. Thomas made it even better. Chaucer talked about it in the Canterbury Tales, in the last tale. In Medieval ages, there's a book called Demons, Devils, and Witchcraft that drew pictures of what the Seven Deadly Sins look like. I want to tell you why they thought they were important.

The question that Chaucer and all the others were trying to answer is how do we go from doing what we think is the right thing to something that's horrendous and awful. That is, how do you go from being just your normal self, to being a murderer. How do you go from just being your normal self to committing fraud that destroys thousands of lives?

Is there a step that we follow, one small step at a time so that it looks okay, but before you know it you find yourself doing things you never thought you would do. Is there a first step and when you get that wrong, it's like a leverage point, a linchpin, like a first domino. When it falls all the other falls with it. That's what the Seven Deadly Sins were about. These are the first steps in the wrong direction.

It's not so much that they're bad, but they lead to something that's dangerous. We'll start with pride. Pride starts off as all the deadly sins do as something delicious and good, and something most of us possess – and it is a good thing. The surprise is that can take a very good thing. Like pride and self-confidence and both ruin it and use it to corrupt ourselves. Lets think about good every day pride. Like, I am proud of my dog, Casey, 20 pound ruby-colored, King Charles Cavalier Spaniel. I would be even more proud if I was out playing in the backyard with Casey and he began digging something up and found a can of money. I would be proud of my dog wouldn't you? This happened to a couple in California who were playing with their dog in their backyard, and the dog began to dig. It dug up eight cans of gold coins with a face value of \$27,000. They were minted in 1847 to 1894. Collector's value, \$10,000,000. I'd be really proud of my dog. I mean, my chest goes out, head goes back, I got this? Yeah, that good feeling, we all know what pride feels like, the sense that you can do anything, you have accomplished something you think is worthwhile, it feels good, you love the applause, this is the way life should be.

Pride goes bad when we have too little or too much of it. When we have too little we play small. Whenever you're around anybody who says "No, I'm nothing" you hear what not enough pride sounds like. Don't you just get tired of it after a while? That they're more proud of how bad they are than how good they could be? They play small all of the time. They run away from their responsibilities, the chance they have to make their life a better place. They instead just play tiny.

We lose ourselves in fear. Soon we think something is exactly the right thing to do and it'll be wrong, and the wrong thing to do will be right. That's what these seven deadly sins are all about, you and I can corrupt our own conscience so that we begin thinking something is good for us that really is killing us and the very thing that we think till kill us will make us well.

If you've ever worked with anybody in addiction, you know that's exactly how it works. In their mind, one more drink will make their life better. Sobriety is the dumbest idea they've ever heard of. How is it that our own conscience can be corrupted so that we're not even our own best friend any more - much less a friend to anybody else.

When pride goes too big, we think we have nothing left to learn. No test yet to pass. No good yet to do. We think we're done. Just isn't the truth.

That's not helpful, since having pride that you can accomplish something, that you have a calling, that your life is significant, that you can make a difference is important. But we go too far when we think we are the center of the universe. I'm wondering if any of you were at the center of the universe last Sunday. The center of the universe last Sunday was Aldersgate Church, 11:30 in the morning when my wife, my son, my daughter and her husband and their two children, and my son-in-laws parents from Michigan side in that pew.



I baptized my one year old granddaughter, that was the center of the universe. When I said I baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, I thought we should just like take a picture hang them on the sanctuary walls. I just would put pictures of my grandchildren all over the place because I'm confident that everyone would love to see them.

When we did my granddaughter's baptism, you should know that when we left this place, we went to my house and at my house we had a fabulous feast. Had brunch, had food, enjoyed each other's company, and celebrated all afternoon. Do you remember what happens to Jesus after his baptism, after the skies open and the voice of God says this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, after God pours out the Holy Spirit, what do you think happens next? God kicks him to boot camp, drives him into an ordeal, into high training for a high purpose.

I expected the gates of heaven to open and the kingdom of God to be established, that he gets applauded and the story ends. I was wrong. That is not how it works. He ends up in the wilderness for 40 days where he's tested, where his back is pushed against the wall because he knows what's coming is going to be hard, not easy, that being the son of God will make his life harder, not easier, that life will be more of a challenge, not less of a challenge.

That's what happens to Jesus in the wilderness. I'm thinking it must happen to you and to me. We must have our own test. Our own places where we can still learn something, still become more like the people we want to be.

I want to give you an anecdote for pride. It's called humility, not false-humility, but just the willingness to admit that you and I are not the center of the world.

The way I'm going to do it is I'm going to say about five or six sentences, I'm going to say the sentence first with my hand on my chest, meaning I get to talk, then I'm going to raise my hand like this and we'll both talk together. The words I say, I invite you to say, you don't have to say them but if they do you good as an act of humility, I would love for you to join along.

Are you ready? God is God and I am not God. God is God and I am not God. God has a purpose for me. God has a purpose for me. I completely surrender myself to God's purpose. I completely surrender myself to God's purpose. I am blessed and don't take my gifts for granted. I am blessed and don't take my gifts for granted. I'm sorry, you're right. Forgive me. I'm sorry, you're right. Forgive me. Thank you. You are forgiven. Thank you. You are forgiven. I invite you, during this lent, to take your place in the world in which you don't run from the possibilities God has given you nor do you think you're done. That there are challenges for which commitment is the only solution. A commitment that begins in humility. I offer to you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.