

We had a challenge in grade 3. Go for the month of, we'll say March, a whole month without taking in a screen, and the teacher would bring in cake. Now, mind you, this way around 2001 so screens weren't quite as pervasive as they are now, but for me this meant not sitting down to watch the hours of tv I was used to, not playing video games or watching my brothers play video games, and not going on the computer, though that wasn't a huge part of my life yet. It was easier than it would be today, but that was going to be a hard month. But I wanted cake.

So I was bound and determined—maybe the challenge aspect was also a good encourager to competitive me. So I'd rush past the tv if my brothers or dad were watching. I honestly can't fathom what I did with my mornings but I passed the time somehow. And the month was going very well until I was sent into the basement to grab meat for dinner from the deepfreeze.

The chest freezer was right beside the computer in the basement and my brother was there watching a movie. So I grab the chicken or ground beef or whatever it was and I ask Mike what he was watching. He was watching Forrest Gump, and it had my attention. I stood there, eyes transfixed on the terrible quality of torrented movie until about 20 minutes later a wave of guilt and fear rush over me.

I wasn't getting cake anymore.

I wasn't going to be among the select few that brought in the signed form from a parent promising that the child hadn't watched any tv.

Dejected, I finished my task and brought the meat upstairs. And my conscience hasn't changed much. I had to share. I told my mom that I had watched TV and had ruined the challenge.

It was an accident, I said. I hadn't set out to watch Tv but it was there and I didn't even realize I was doing it and I felt awful but I didn't know what to do because I had lost out on the challenge and I wanted to do it and I wanted to get cake.

Now, I don't know if she had seen her son, usually glued to the tv whenever possible, really trying and succeeding at watching less tv, or if she just didn't want to listen to her son complain about losing a challenge and cake for the next week or so, but she said it was ok and we'd still send in a signed slip.

So I guiltily ate cake with those who had persevered. Who knows how many of the others were filthy liars too.

Temptation is like that, isn't it? It slithers up to you and presents you with an enticing opportunity before you even realize what's happening. No one needs to seek out temptation. They might seek out sin, sitting right outside the door of sin, reveling in what could happen if they shared that bit of gossip, what life would be like if they just moved in with their significant other, how easy life could be if they joined in the scheme to get easy money. But the fact that they are sitting and pondering the possibilities of a different life, of new pleasures, that means that temptation has already found them and caught their attention.

That's how it works in sinners, at least. We seem to have already been lost in our temptations before we realize that we're salivating over them. But in today's readings we see sinless ones, those without prior sin making it even easier to succumb to temptation, and we see what happens when temptation is placed before them.

In our Gospel lesson we see Christ beginning His ministry, and God is intentional that it begins with temptation. The Spirit leads Him out into the wilderness to be tempted. But He makes it extra difficult for Himself to resist that which would catch His eyes. He fasts for 40 days, so when Matthew tells us that Jesus is hungry, it seems like an understatement. He's famished. He has been deprived of one of life's most basic needs, and so when Satan shows up and invites Jesus to simply use His powers and create a little snack—not an indulgent feast, just a morsel—it hardly seems wrong for Jesus to heed Satan's advice.

And the next temptation, that to jump from the highest peak, this hardly seems absurd for the Christ either. The same angels that were rejoicing at His birth would not have left the scene so there's no reason why they wouldn't protect Him. And if He's looking for followers, if He's trying to instill belief in the crowds, not much else would convince the masses than a man falling hundreds of metres only to be caught by a glorious host of angels. That would get people talking.

And the last one, maybe the greatest temptation of all, Satan simply offers Christ a shortcut. If you want to rule all the world, being the king of creation as prophesied in scripture, then simply

bow the knee and it's yours. No need for these suffering servant prophecies, no need to live amongst an exhausting people, caring for them out of your own time and energy. Jump to the end of your journey and enjoy the spoils.

Everything Christ is tempted with is rightly His. There's no reason why He shouldn't enjoy a feast, protection, or glory. But as true God and true man, it is not His prerogative, His time to make the choice to enjoy such blessings, but rather He demonstrates His perfect faith by saying "I'll wait on the Lord to provide each of those things in the proper time; thanks anyways, Satan."

And His ministry begins here because this is where corruption and destruction, where sin and death began too.

In the garden, Eve was approached by someone outside of herself that lured her into temptation. Like Jesus, she and Adam were sinless. They didn't have that corruption constantly driving them towards another sin and another self-serving decision, but Satan was quick to change that. He presents to her the one thing forbidden to the newly made couple and highlights just how glorious it must be if it's not allowed. And the highlight he puts before her is the exact same thing that tempts us in every moment, but we just aren't so bold as to say it out loud.

You'll be like God.

And to get there, all you need to do is twist a few words of what God said, and ignore a few of the commands and consequences that God promised you of (because He can't really be serious about them, can He?), and ta-da—you'll be like God, enjoying the pleasures you desire.

Adam and Eve reached for something that was not rightly theirs even though they had literal paradise at their finger tips, and it brought about death. Christ, the King of the Universe, starving and humiliated, resisted Satan's invitation to an easier day, and His resistance to the evil one's God-rejecting actions brings life.

Christ's obedience is the answer to Adam's defiance; His submission to the Father is the repair of Adam and all his descendants' rebellion.

At the outset of Jesus' ministry, of Him teaching about God's kingdom, making it a reality by His healings and feedings and power over nature, by His forgiving and uplifting and reconciling, we

see that He will be the Faithful One, serving God whole-heartedly rather than straying where we are apt to wander.

And His faithfulness is our life.

Certainly it leads to our life, because it means that the Sinless One will still be the Sinless One by the time His blood is shed on the cross, unsullied by any broken commandments, and thus His righteousness is attributed to you, His Life given to you, the Father's approval of Him placed right into your hands apart from anything you've said or done or prayed or thought. It's all yours because Christ lived it out and died anyways (for the consequences of your rebellion) and in rising He proves true victory over this one who wants to tempt us all into death. Yes, His faithfulness leads to your life, but even here and now, it is your life.

As you go, day by day, dear Christian yearning to love and serve and live faithfully out of what has been done for you, yet still burdened by the corruption of your sin, still battered by the temptation of pleasures not rightfully yours and vices that will cause you harm, He is your wisdom and faithfulness to persist. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10: No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Christ is your way to endure it. We are invited to pray to Him for strength, to remember His grace that was bought by His blood and be reminded of the sufficiency of what you have and the lie of what the temptation promises, to remember the good of how God ordered everything and the harm that comes to us and our loved ones when we break His commands.

Which, this is a little tangent that I'd like you to follow me on for one second. God doesn't make His commands as a maniacal man in the sky seeing if we can jump through His hoops and delighted to punish us when we inevitably fail. No, each command, from one to ten, has beautiful purpose in bringing life and beauty to the world. We should refrain from committing adultery not simply because it will make God upset, but also because it ruins families and health and lives. We shouldn't murder for much the same reason. We should honour our parents because, if they are doing their job and loving you and providing for you, it means you will be learning how to be a

responsible human into the next generation. We should honor God's name and observe the Sabbath because He knows that if we neglect Him and His Word we will forget about Him and end up alone and hopeless. None of these are arbitrary but they truly are blessings. They protect us and guide us and they point us back to Him.

And as we seek Christ's help to fulfill them, we not only please God, but we bring goodness to our neighbour and we protect ourselves from a world of suffering. And Christ, who endured in the wilderness of the desert and indeed of this whole dying creation, He is faithful to this day, faithful to forgive you when you falter, faithful to sustain you when the evil one turns his targets onto tempting you, and believe it: Satan couldn't tempt Christ on earth away from saving you, so Christ will not ever be tempted into abandoning you. No, He will be faithful to see you to your last day. Amen.