

Tempted?
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Finished aerobics? Check. Eaten a good breakfast? Check. Brewed up a mug of steaming hot coffee? Check. Now it was on to the business of the day. It was time to write that article and make the deadline. So she marched right into her home office, fired up the computer and waited for the screen to warm up.

She had been mulling the story over all week long, of course. Just like she did every week. Everything made her think about it. Each situation seemed to offer another possible angle for getting at what she wanted to say. Every time she bumped into someone she thought of a new way to tell the story. It went on like that for days. Now there was not much time left. She really couldn't put it off any more.

As the computer came to life she noticed it in the stack of yesterday's mail. Why hadn't she seen it before? There it was, just as plain as day: a Netflix wrapper. Was it here?! She tore it open to check. She could just peek quickly and then she would know whether that British mystery series had made it yet. And there they were: four new episodes ready to go.

The episodes weren't very long. Surely she could take the time for one quick episode. Just one...she wouldn't get sucked in to watching all of them. Not this time! Especially if she fast forwarded through the opening and closing credits...

They are usually small. Little things that don't *really* matter. Yet sometimes we can feel surrounded by them. Walking down a street one store might offer you a chance to go *way off* your diet—and why not, chocolate is so much better than low-fat, high fiber, nutrient packed green and grey things any day. The next store might suggest that you spend a whole week's worth of grocery money on a new hat or pair of boots—you would look so good in them, after all! A coffee shop, restaurant or bar might remind you of some things you could be doing with your Sunday morning rather than going to church. Maybe things you miss doing. After all, what is one missed Sunday here or there?

They are just *little* temptations, right? What does it matter if we are a little bit late for a deadline? That happens to everyone...What does it matter if we weigh a pound or two or five more? Most folks do these days... Each one of deserves some fine things along the way, don't we? We all feel better when we *look fabulous*, right? And can anything compare to a Sunday morning spent lazing around over coffee cake, or some other fabulous edible or potable? It is such a lovely time of the week—everyone just seems to be so much more relaxed. All of these

things are just little, bitty temptations...so what harm could come from giving in? So, all too often, we each do in our own ways.

Did you notice that Satan started with something small, too? He started tempting Jesus with bread—just simple bread for a hungry man. Poor Jesus had been out in the desert for forty days and forty nights without a thing to eat. Forty days and forty nights enduring the extreme temperatures of the dessert—sometimes sweating, sometimes shivering, but always hungry. And not just hungry, but “famished.”

Isn't it kind of odd that Jesus, whom Christian tradition understands to be God incarnate, could *get* famished? That is such a *human* condition. Now of course Christianity does affirm Jesus to be *both* fully *God* and fully *human*, but I have noticed something odd about the way that many people seem to interpret this passage. For many people it seems to be a foregone conclusion that Jesus sailed through these temptations *easily*. One Christian perspective I read was that Jesus *could never feel tempted* in any situation or he wouldn't be Christ. The reasoning seems to be that Jesus somehow shifted over into his “fully God mode,” so he didn't really get hungry or otherwise feel the particular challenge of each temptation. Yet, Christianity hasn't historically understood Jesus to work in modes. Jesus Christ is not understood to be *sometimes* fully human and *sometimes* fully God. He doesn't switch from mode to mode. He is somehow fully God and fully human at the same time. So Jesus must have been able to feel tempted, because that part of what it means to be *human*.

In addition, I think we lose something big if we embrace a modal perspective on Jesus. I think we lose our salvation. Not because we are *able* to undo God's works of grace in our lives, and not because grace is something *we* human beings confer. Grace belongs fully to God to give. But to be human means precisely that we are *able* to be tempted. And if Jesus were not able to be tempted then he can't save us from temptations either. It is no challenge for God to avoid temptation. But humans? We give in to temptations all the time.

Who among us hasn't stolen some time to play or enjoy something instead of honoring a commitment to a larger concern? I'll tell you true, I get a lot of random and non-work related e-mails during business hours. And of course, I send them, too, now and again. I guarantee you if I had been in the desert for forty days and forty nights I would have been mightily tempted to make bread from stones if I were in Jesus' place.

Who among us has not tried to make God do what we want from time to time? “Hey God, if you can just help me pass this algebra test, I will promise to go to church every Sunday for the rest of the year...!” I would bet that if many of us were given the chance to demonstrate power in Christ's place that we might just have taken the Devil up on the offer to show off and command angels. After all, wouldn't that have showed Satan who was really the boss?

Likewise, who among us, if we were offered the chance to rule the world would say “no?” Especially if that rule would be indisputable and immediately made real. We may not want the responsibility, but if everything would go just like we wanted, wouldn’t we go for that? Each one of us has a vision of how to improve things, and what an ideal world would look like. That is another part of being human; we project our desires into the world. And I don’t think that is any less true for Jesus. I imagine that if Jesus had said yes to ruling the world that he would have found a way to do it well. I bet he felt *that* temptation, too.

I think Jesus must have *wanted* to say yes to everything that Satan offered. What human wouldn’t want to be fed when hungry? Human beings want to have power and be in control, too. And if Christ is fully human, than he must have been able to be tempted, or the whole scene is some sort of empty symbolic play rather than an example of events we ourselves might sometime encounter, and a teaching moment of what to do.

Each of us faces temptations. Some are small like eating when we are on a diet or fasting. Some are bigger and more important, and more directly impact our relationships with others and with God. Maybe we don’t go to church enough, even when our schedule is free. Maybe we willfully ignore what we know God wants us to do so we can get more money. Maybe we take advantage of people just because we can. There are limitless things it *can* be.

The trick is to discern the little temptations so we can avoid them, because they have a way of snowballing into bigger ones. Temptation starts small but keeps going until we are tempted to assume power over others and even God. That’s one part of the lesson I find in the text today.

The other is that it is through Christ’s *humanity* that we have a fighting chance to resist temptations of every size. Through discipleship—through following Christ’s example and being like him, we, too, are able to resist temptation. We, too, can lean on all that is Godly in us, and call on Christ’s name to help us discern and avoid temptations.

God was fully present in Jesus Christ, and we can call on God’s grace to help us as well. Jesus is the prototype of a humanity transformed by a radical openness to God. And as disciples we are called to follow, and be like, Jesus. Not simply by being “nice,” or “meek,” but by recognizing Satan at work even in our own hearts, naming that malevolent presence, and ordering Satan away with power and in God’s name.

Was Jesus Christ *actually* tempted to give in to worldly power? *I* have no doubt. Our fully human Jesus must have been. Because to be human is to know temptations. But God is at work in our human disciple hearts just as God was through Christ. And God can help us to stand up

to—and shout down—the temptations that divide us from one another and God. And that's the good news of the gospel this morning.

Amen?

Mathew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” 5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.