

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Evelyn Rose, age four, faced marshmallow temptation alone in the Baby Lab. (Do you remember that marshmallow test?: gobble down your scrumptious-looking marshmallow right now, OR, if you can wait a few minutes, get two to enjoy. This test evaluates impulse control and delayed gratification, which correlate strongly with success later in life.) Evelyn decided to wait, but it wasn't easy. Trying to restrain herself, she hid the treat in her hands, bounced it like a ball and even licked it.

In the end, Evelyn held out for an extraordinary fifteen minutes, astounding her mother and the researchers as well! What the original studies had not shown, and they hoped to find, was why children waited, or didn't, to eat marshmallows.

For this novel twist on an old experiment, three- to five-year-olds were separated into two groups. In both groups, the children were first given an art project to work on. Each was given some dingy used crayons, then told that the researcher would return shortly with "better" art supplies. With the "unreliable" group, after two and a half minutes she would return empty-handed, saying, "I'm sorry, I made a mistake. We don't have other art supplies after all." Next she would offer the child stickers, but renege on that promise too.

The "reliable" group would experience the same setup, but the researcher would return bringing the promised materials each time.

Then the marshmallow task would follow, with the explanation that the child could have one marshmallow immediately or wait for the researcher to return, for two.

Not surprisingly, the children in the "unreliable" group, who had experienced the researcher not keeping her promises, ate their marshmallow quickly, in about 3 minutes. But those with whom she had proved trustworthy waited an average of twelve minutes. That's an astonishing four times longer than those who had found her untrustworthy.

When most of us think of temptation, we think of Jesus in the wilderness, or the Garden of Eden, not of marshmallows. The lectionary takes us to both those places today. Let's begin in Eden.

When we consider, we realize that the temptation of Adam and Eve at its heart involved insecurity and mistrust. We sometimes refer to the devil as "the great deceiver," with good reason. But in Eden, the serpent didn't so much deceive as sow mistrust. He distorted the command of God and played on the insecurities of Adam and Eve, in order to call into question God's intentions. "*Did God say...? God hasn't told you everything about the forbidden fruit. So what else has God not told? What else is God withholding?*" It played out as a seduction based on mistrust, leading to the breaking and warping of the relationship between the humans and God, between humans themselves, and then between them and all creation.

Our Romans text says that Adam was "*a 'type' of Jesus, the One Who was to come.*" Elsewhere Paul talks about Jesus as the "Second Adam." The fathers of the church loved this image—they called it "recapitulation"—that is, that Jesus in himself sums up and re-presents/presents

humanity. Unpacking Pastor Paul, they see Jesus as the faithful Adam who gets it right; in him all of Adam's children get a do-over.

So how is Jesus in temptation recapitulating the temptation in Eden? How does he get it right? How does he trust God? Let's take a look.

Here's the context: in the previous verses Jesus has been baptized by John in the Jordan River, humbly standing with self-identified sinners. Over John's protests, Jesus convinces him to proceed, *to fulfill all righteousness*—that Jesus might embody in humble obedience right, covenantal relationship with God. As he comes up from the water, he sees the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, and alighting on him. He hears God's voice saying, "*This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*" God affirms and celebrates that relationship, as one of family intimacy and delight!

Then Jesus is led by God's Spirit into the wilderness for this testing. From the following verses we learn that he spent forty days and nights fasting—and, we are to understand, praying. This forty-day fast also evokes Moses' forty days of fasting. This is more than reminding us of other fasts and fast-ers though. Yet another comparison is being set up, this one by Pastor Matthew. Like the Israelites, who wandered forty years in the wilderness, Jesus here will face testing. In fact, his temptations will mirror Israel's particular struggles. He is the faithful Israelite, as well as the faithful Adam, who gets it right so that in him God's people get a do-over!

The tempter challenges his identity as Son of God, which God's voice had announced forty days ago. "*If [or since] you are the Son of God, speak and make these stones bread.*" *Take care of your physical needs!* I can imagine the postscript: *after all, God helps those who help themselves!* Yes, the first temptation especially suggests Eden, involving eating as it does. We know what it's like to have our physical appetites clamoring for attention. Our body's urgent needs, whether for nourishment or sex or relief from pain, do cloud our perspective on our true priorities!

Jesus trusts God's provision in the face of his overwhelming physical needs. He uses the words of Scripture to respond. We could say that with Scripture he deflects temptation. But more than that, in Scripture he finds words that voice his trust in God's provision. He knows and affirms that he and we, as human, are much more than our bodies alone, and that all of who we are is sustained by God. He chooses to trust God rather than inappropriately use his power to fill his own needs; he refuses to equate God's lack of provision for his physical needs to lack of divine love. "*One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" With this Deuteronomy quote Jesus sets a different trajectory than Adam's, or Israel's; he chooses dependence on and trust in God.

In the second temptation Jesus is tested regarding not God's provision, but God's protection. Will he trust in God's love and care, or demand proof of it? The devil disguises this temptation as displaying God's glory, and Jesus' messiahship. He takes him to the temple and, again questioning God's words, with "*If/since you are the Son of God,*" quotes from a psalm: *throw yourself down, and God's promised angels will protect you and bear you up!* Jesus is discerning, not misled by proof-texting out of context. With another quote from Deuteronomy, he unmasks the disguised

temptation; “*do not put the Lord your God to the test.*” He refuses to “prove God,” put God’s love and care to the test. Unlike Adam, unlike Israel, he chooses the way of trust.

Finally comes the third temptation, and here the Enemy uses no subtlety, makes no mocking pretense of deferring to God—the gloves are off. This is bare-knuckled, full-on, deadly opposition. Power over all the world’s kingdoms is offered to Jesus immediately, without God’s “price-tag” of obedience and humility. Is the Father Who declares the Son to be beloved truly loving? Will Jesus humbly trust in the slow work of God, despite the potential cost of obedience? Or will he worship at the devil’s altar of efficient, pain-free guaranteed results (with a little idolatry thrown in)?

All the kingdoms of the world in their splendor are offered Jesus in return for worshipping the Enemy. And isn’t this, after all, God’s ultimate purpose for Jesus, to have authority over all? That’s how this Gospel according to Matthew ends, with Jesus’ proclamation of having been given “*all authority in heaven and on earth.*” Why not take the shortcut? Why face the twists and turns of the future, known or unknown, when this achieves the same end so efficiently?!? The poet W.H. Auden observes that impatience is the cardinal sin for which man was driven from Paradise. Others phrase it, “Haste is ever the sin of Adam” (that is, in the desire to become *wise, like God, knowing good and evil*, impatiently choosing what seems the shortest, obvious path). But Jesus trusts God, and the slow work of God. He chooses God’s timing instead of pressing for his own, now. He knows that the means do not justify the ends. Again he uses the words of Deuteronomy: “*Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*” He affirms his trust and allegiance, his commitment to worship and serve only God. Faithfully—unlike Israel, unlike Adam—he chooses trust.

Jesus knows today’s appointed psalm—in fact, he lives it! He above all is the Faithful One who cries out in prayer to God. He trusts in the Lord and the Lord’s steadfast love. Ultimately, as Matthew and we his audience know, Jesus will be “thrown down,” in the words of the second temptation, from and by the Temple. The Temple authorities will closely mirror the Tempter’s words, in their own mockery: “*He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’*” In anguish, in that ultimate “time of distress” on the cross, his last words will seem to abandon trust—“*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Yet they will be a prayer offered by the Faithful One! He himself will experience what he promises his disciples, an enduring to and through the end, with the outcome of salvation. Vindicated gloriously in the resurrection, this is how he will prove the trustworthiness of the Father he trusts!

We would love for our temptations, our testings, to be as straightforward as marshmallow tests, wouldn’t we?!? But they’re much more sophisticated than that. When our body’s needs clamor at us, we struggle to know when our own capabilities and efforts should be used to provide for those needs, and when we should wait on God. When we ask for protection, are we testing God, or truly providing a way for God’s glory to be shown? When authority is offered us, are we self-aware, or lazy, if we hesitate to wield it? Is this God’s timing, or am I pressing my agenda? Our testing is NOT one size fits all, and there is no handy instruction manual to follow. TRUST is a Lenten practice we all need!

But let’s go back to the marshmallow test analogy. There is a person we can trust while in temptation! I’m not calling Jesus our researcher, although in my life he has proven utterly trustworthy. Wonderfully, incredibly more, we can say: Jesus has freely agreed to become an

experimental subject, one who has already gone through this for us, ahead of us. He has trusted, resisted and endured through the entire test. In and because of him, we as Adam's children get a do-over. In and because of him, we know and experience God our Father as trustworthy. In and because of him, we can and do affirm every week: *You, O Lord, are unchanging in your mercy, and Your nature is Love!* Thanks be to God!