

Lent

Matthew 4. 1-11

I want to give you all a little ancient history lesson today.

When I was a kid, there were 2 ways to watch a movie. The first way was to go to the movie theatre. I probably did that once or twice a year – usually only on my birthday, if there was something I wanted to see.

The other way to watch a movie was to watch one on TV. Now my memory might be hazy, but I know there were only two channels and only one of them seemed to show movies – or at least the kind I wanted to watch. And they were only on at set times – like a Saturday night at 7.30.

So, I probably got to watch a movie once a week at the most, and I didn't get a choice – I had to watch what was being shown on the TV. But I remember when Star Wars was going to be on TV. I spent the whole week looking forward to that. And Saturday felt almost endless waiting for the day to pass so that it would be 7.30 when the movie came on. I was so excited. It probably also explains why I fell in love so hard with Princess Leia.

Then, when I was about 11 years old, my parents bought a video player. You might not have seen a video tape. They're about the size of a book and they have one movie on them. In order to rent the movie, we would drive into town and walk around the video store looking at the movies that we could rent. There were probably only a handful of new releases available.

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But when we rented a video, we would watch it on a Saturday night, as the major event of our weekend. And then we would wake up early on Sunday, while mum and dad were sleeping in, and we would watch the movie again. And when we got to our favourite parts, we would rewind them and watch them over again. Often if the movie had a swear word in it, we would rewind and replay that swear word, over and over again, laughing our heads off.

After videos came DVDs, which I'm sure you all can remember. And then people would start downloading movies from the internet and putting them on little hard drives, and you could plug these into your TV and share movies with each other.

And then, only about 13 years ago, I heard about something called "Netflix" and I figured out how to watch TV shows and movies straight to my TV. You won't realise how mind blowing that was for people of my age. To choose from thousands of films or TV shows and just click a button and have them play. I thought that the human race had surely reached its absolute peak. There was just the issue of sometimes having to wait while my show would buffer during peak hours when everyone in NZ was trying to use the internet, but it seemed a small price to pay.

And now? I can watch a movie on my phone on the toilet, lying in bed, waiting in the doctor's office. Anywhere, anytime, as many as I want. I have watched 3 movies in one day. I have watched a movie on my phone,

while also kind of watching a movie that someone else is watching on the TV. I often find myself watching videos on my phone while I am watching TV or a movie. My 17-year-old daughter told me that I was acting like a screenager the other day.

So, you know what this unlimited access to movies has done? It's made me enjoy movies less. I actually don't even really feel like watching movies anymore. The fact that I have drowned myself in movies in recent years has taken away my love for them.

At the moment, in the church calendar, we are in the season of Lent. Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter, which remembers the 40 days when Jesus was tempted and tested in the desert – which is what today's Bible reading has been about.

During Lent, it is typical for people to give up something that they like. Some people give up lollies or chocolate or alcohol, or some other nice treat. This practice of giving up something is called "fasting". And it is a spiritual practice. What I have read is, that when you feel your hunger for food, or whatever it is that you have denied yourself, then it can help you to become more aware of your deepest hunger, which is your need for God.

We live in a society that can easily get us addicted. Food, vaping, gambling, video games, alcohol, movies and entertainment – most of us probably have some experience of feeling like we are getting addicted to something.

One of the key things that drives our addiction is that it numbs the deep pain and deep hunger that we all have within us for

something more. Addictions are like medicines we take to stop us feeling the pain of feeling not good enough, or of feeling lost, or of feeling angry, or of feeling grief and loss. As long as we are feeding our addictions, we are not feeling these deeper pains and hungers.

So, fasting allows us to uncover and see more clearly these deeper pains and hungers that often are driving our addictions. And when we are addicted to something – like movies – we eventually stop enjoying that thing, because we become a slave to it.

The purpose of Lent is to prepare us for the message of Easter, where the deeper issues of our pain and suffering are addressed. I will discuss what the message of Easter is in an upcoming sermon.

But during Lent, why not think about what your addictions are. And why not consider fasting from that addiction. Even if not completely, try to limit it. Could I, for example, limit myself to one movie a week for Lent?

Then your deeper pains and hungers might come to the surface, so you can see your true needs. Just as Jesus faced 40 days of temptations before he began his ministry, and was tempted by Satan with pleasure, fame and power, but knew that he needed something even better than those things, why not take that journey too, so that you can allow yourself to be healed and made whole in some way, as we make the journey towards Easter.