When I was about 10 years old, my parents, my grandmother and I took a trip to Tangier Island. Tangier Island is in Accomack County, Virginia, surrounded by the Chesapeake Bay. The population on the island is about 750 people.

There is no bridge to Tangier Island nor are there any cars on the island. You leave your car on the mainland and catch a boat to get onto the island. Once there, you bike or walk.

We had planned to take a double-decker tourist boat on its regular run from the mainland and then walk from the dock to a local restaurant which boasts a wonderful seafood buffet that is famous. But we missed the boat and had to hire a small boat captain, instead, to take us over.

The whole time we rode on the small boat we talked about the renowned buffet that awaited us at the end of the boat ride. Shrimp and crabs and scallops and fish. I could just about taste them.

We arrived just a little past noon. Now my grandmother, whose name was Essie, was one of those folks who always ate lunch at noon. It was part of who she was. Those of you who know me well that while I’m not quite as rigid as my Nanny, I don’t go too long without eating either.

I was hungry, especially since we’d gotten up early that day to make the trip. We bolted off the boat to go to the restaurant. The problem was that when we got there, we weren’t allowed in. The restaurant was open for lunch only to the guests of that big tour boat we’d missed. I don’t know how it is now, but back then, there was no other eating establishment of any type open at midday on the island. There wasn’t even a convenience store as we think of them today where we could buy a snack.

My grandmother stomped up and down the streets proclaiming that it was past lunch time and she had to eat. And in an action that earned me a nickname of “Little Essie” I stomped along right behind her, saying just what she did, my stomach growling all the while. I am sure Tangier is very beautiful, filled with nature created by God. But I missed all of it as I stomped along the sidewalks joining with my grandmother in grumbling to everyone we saw about what a terrible place this was because we didn’t get our dinner. We were being rude visitors especially since our problems came about through our own fault. We were committing sins – the sin of being rude to others and the sin of missing the blessings of nature God had for us that day. If we’d been on “Survivor,” our behavior would have gotten us voted off the island. We had been made more prone to these sins because we were hungry.

Temptation is everywhere. It’s a part of life. We open ourselves up to sinning in the midst of temptation because we are hungry. It’s not so much that we’ve missed breakfast, lunch or dinner, but that we’ve failed to nourish our spiritual needs – failed to stay in fellowship with God.

The protein for our spiritual diets is Scripture. To prevent ourselves from becoming spiritually famished so that we can successfully fight temptations when they come, we spend time studying Scripture. Just as we need to eat protein every day, we need to read our Bible everyday.

Our spiritual energy comes through prayer. If we pray the daily offices in the Book of Common Prayer, we would formally pray to God four times a day – morning, noon, evening and bedtime. Prayer throughout the day, everyday, whether formal or informal – through talking to God in everything we do, is important to succeeding in the battle against temptation. Prayer, then, is the potatoes and pasta of our spiritual lives.

We also nourish ourselves through time spent in a spiritual community – such as this one and others. Communal worship, then, becomes the fruits and vegetables of our spiritual diet. A healthy spiritual diet also includes reaching out to others, helping them in the name of Christ. In doing this, we realize that the problems of others often are greater than ours. We take the focus off ourselves and put it on others. Helping others then is the dairy of our spiritual diet.

God also wants us to have fun and enjoy our lives. A healthy spiritual diet includes a few desserts. The key, however, is not to have too many desserts. Adam and Eve, for example, had everything they needed for physical and spiritual health and for enjoyment in the Garden, yet they wanted things they couldn’t have.

Maryetta Anschutz, former associate dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, writes:

“Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgments we make about strangers or friends who make choices we do not understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease. Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper to define our lives or when addiction to wealth, power, influence over others, vanity, or an inordinate need for control defines who we are. Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins: a racist joke, a questionable business practice for the greater good, a criticism of a spouse or partner when he or she is not around. Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life that we lose sight of life itself. These are the faceless moments of evil that, while mundane, lurk in the recesses of our lives and our souls.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

If we are spiritually hungry, temptation wins. We lose a skirmish or two in the cosmic battle between good and evil, just like Adam and Eve, just like me on the Island.

After we had spent a couple of hours on Tangier Island, the boat came for us again and took us back to the mainland. We found a seafood restaurant there, ate, and went home -- in the end, feeling satisfied and full again

In our struggles, and, even, in those times when we let temptation win, God is with us. God is ready to nourish us, to help us back into the right relationship with God and our fellow humans. We just need to be open to receive that nourishment through prayer, Scripture, communal worship and service. We can’t get voted off the metaphorical island with God. God forgives our sins. God blesses us.

1. Anschutz, M. (2010). Pastoral Perspective on Matthew 4:1–11. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A (Vol. 2, p. 46). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)