

Let us pray: Lord our God, I pray that you would sanctify the words I have prepared. Make them your words Lord, may your voice be heard in this place today. We pray that you would open our ears to hear your message, that we would be still and know that you are God. In the name of Father, Son and Spirit, Amen.

There is a super cute Youtube video that I wish I could show you this morning. It is a video about patience, a scientific study performed on children. In it, a researcher takes several children who seem to be from ages 2 up to around 7-8 individually into private rooms, and has them sit down at a table by themselves. They then bring out a single plate, and place it in front of the child. On the plate is a single, giant, pillowy marshmallow. The researcher tells the child that they will be stepping out of the room for a few minutes, and that they are welcome to eat the giant, pillowy, sweet marshmallow, but that if they choose not to eat it, the researcher will bring them a second marshmallow when they return. It is a study in delayed gratification, and in the video, you can watch the torment and struggle of the children as they wrestle with temptation.

Sometimes it is hard to follow the instructions when no-one is watching. I remember one time, when I was in elementary school, only grade five or six, a painful parent-teacher meeting that I had to be a part of. There was a problem, you see. During school, I had been enthusiastic, engaged, and happy. I enjoyed learning, and so I did well, *during* school. Once I got home, though, it had been a different story. My homework projects seldom got done, because there was always something better to do. I'd put them off, figuring there would always be time later. Well, there hadn't been, and so Mrs. Fleisig had asked my Dad to come in with me to have a talk about my work habits. I can remember sitting there as they talked, staring down at my shoes, just completely miserable. I was found out, I had disappointed, I was embarrassed and ashamed. The misery of the homework I'd avoided had returned, concentrated a hundred times. After that meeting came the crackdown, with my dad and my teacher working together to make sure I worked when I had to. I'm sure I resisted, and I'm

sure it wasn't fun, but it wasn't painful enough for me to remember. I remembered that meeting, I remembered staring at my shoes.

I read a great quotation this week, in an article I posted on the church Facebook page by Ann Voskamp. She writes "I didn't know until my heart almost bled itself dry, that there is really only two choices when begging temptation is looking you square in your twitching eye: There is either the pain of self-denial — or the pain of self-destruction." Avoiding temptation is painful, because it is hard to deny ourselves. When the sun was shining outside, I didn't want to do my crummy homework. When that marshmallow was sitting in front of those children, it was agony to leave it alone. But if they avoided the self-denial, they missed out on the second marshmallow. I had to do that homework anyway, and I had to be painfully corrected. I was fortunate enough to have a teacher and a family that loved me, to give me commands to correct me, so that I didn't fall ultimately into self-destruction, laziness, and a complete lack of self-discipline. It was their guidance that saved me.

In our passage from John this morning, chapter 14 verse 15, Jesus says to his disciples: "If you love me, keep my commands". Keep my commands. Do as I say. Jesus goes on to say on the next page (15:12) "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you".

This command falls on us today. Love each other, as Christ has loved us. This is the instruction we have been given, and we are faced with a choice. Do we follow it, or not? Will we commit ourselves to learning more about Jesus Christ, to learning how to love like he did, or will we be too busy, too distracted, too caught up? Will we have the strength to choose the pain of self-denial?

Or will we put it off, will we say "There is always tomorrow", will we harden ourselves, pretend not to see our own sinfulness because we don't want to face it? Beware, because there is always a cost. The pain of destruction cannot be dodged forever, and it does not shrink when we ignore it.

I am the worst for this. Say there's someone I know I should call on Monday. I won't call them Monday, because I just would rather not. Then on Tuesday, I won't call them because I should have called them Monday, and I'd still rather not. By Wednesday, I won't call them because then I'd have to apologize for being late. But waiting longer doesn't help. It's not easier to call on Thursday, it's harder. I should have called Monday.

We are commanded to love one another. We are commanded to live new lives. These commands are for your benefit, to save your life. Brothers and sisters, we can destroy ourselves, we can suffer death by pillowy marshmallow, if we never have the courage to try to change and accept the pain of self-denial.

But our passage in John gives us a huge encouragement: Jesus commands, but he also promises. The promise is that we will not be alone, we will not be orphaned, we will not be abandoned. As we follow his commands, when we make the choice to follow rather than stay where we are, we will not be destroyed.

Once I finally make that phone call on Thursday, I'm always glad I did. I'm very glad that I changed my work habits and passed grade six. How happy the children were who waited and received a marshmallow for each hand.

So my question for you this morning is this: As you come here to find Christ, to listen to his commands to love and to change, what will you choose? Will you offer forgiveness today, or put it off? Will you try to change how you spend your money today, or do you think it will get done later? Will you show love to your wife today, or your husband, or to your children? Will you change your sinful ways today, or do you still think it will somehow get easier?

May we have the courage to love Jesus today. May we follow him today. May the Spirit give us the strength we need, and the comfort we need as we endure the difficulty and the pain that will come. In the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, Amen.