

Literal forbidden fruit

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March 3, 2014

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I have lived in the U.S. for nearly three years now, and there is so much to love: the beauty and the grandeur of the landscape, the welcome and hospitality I've found in one city after another, and so many new friends.

But there is one thing I don't love so much. After half a lifetime as a slim person, I suddenly find myself struggling with my weight. I have spent some time analyzing the difference between the eating patterns here and at home in the U.K., and I have come to the conclusion that food is a problem here.

Because of this, I've been reading the story of Adam and Eve, and that of the temptations of Christ, in a completely new light. Neither story struck me before as having direct application to everyday life, at least not without a good bit of interpretation first. But this year, in addition to the layers of metaphorical meaning, one thing seems to read straight off the page into my current situation: in each story, the first temptation begins with food.

Unlike most of the world, we have an abundance here of ready-made food that's there for the taking. It looks pretty and inviting, it's ready to eat and requires no work, and it's cheap to buy.

But poor labeling means we often don't really know what we are eating. And the deliberate addition of sugar, salt, and fat—even to staples such as bread—gives our food an addictive quality. Find out a little more about the production methods behind processed food, and alarm bells begin to ring. So unless we are prepared to slow down enough to make our own food from raw ingredients, we find ourselves

regularly eating food that looks fantastic but actually does us more harm than good.

“I can resist anything except temptation,” wrote Oscar Wilde. And certainly a little self-indulgence can be good for you from time to time. As I said in [this week’s lectionary column for the *Century*](#), sometimes breaking your own rules to eat cake is the right thing to do, even in Lent.

But sometimes we have to draw a line. I’ve had to work out how to live and eat differently in this culture of fast food, processed food, and junk food, before I got into serious trouble. I’m glad to be reverting to my happy and healthy self, eating less food of better quality.

Yet I’m left thinking that the Genesis story of shiny, sweet, tempting, but ultimately destructive food is as much a reality as a metaphor. Maybe we too need to learn to reject food that looks like a quick fix for our hunger, and to learn to take better care of our God-given bodies.