These days, when I get on Facebook, it is simply to update the Church's page, post some pictures or Scripture verse. But occasionally I browse to see what people are talking about. But recently a friend of mine posted a video, you may have seen this yourself. It was animated clip with a vintage, 1940’s style art, looking like an old Disney classic. But the video was of a dystopian, apocalyptic vision of a world overrun with smartphones. The protagonist was a young child, who watches the people around him live with their faces glued to their smartphones as they live through their devices.

One scene has a line of people walking down the sidewalk and falling into an uncovered manhole, one after another. A different scene has the protagonist pulling at people’s coat sleeves and flipping off their ball caps trying to see who will turn their attention away from their devices.

People were recording videos of street muggings and taking selfies in front of burning buildings, then posting them on social media. Characters were continuously “Liking” or “LOL” (laughing out loud for those who may not know) other people’s posts, implying a social capital for online value or worth.

My friend asked a question with the posting of this video, “What do you think?”

After some chatter from parents about the dilemma of how much and what kind of media they let their children participate in, and how smartphones and social media have addicted the world, the conversation turned to “How the smartphone functions in today’s society.”

And by that we meant “Why do people turn to their smartphones in the way described in the video?” And it relates to this movie.

At our house, we’ve recently had this 80’s movie night binge. One movie we watched was called, Morgan Stewart’s Coming Home. It was prompted by a movie in the movie called Attack of the Killer Tomatoes, and I think I was reminded of it because our house, and thanks to Larry and Barb, the church, seemed to be overrun with tomatoes.

The plot of the movie was Morgan, who has been shipped off to boarding school after boarding school by his parents, because they don’t have time to parent because Morgan’s father is a Senator and Morgan’s mother is a “King Maker,” as we call it.

But during the next election cycle comes, Morgan’s parents think its a good idea to run a family values campaign, so they call Morgan home and use him as a prop for their political gain. The first morning Morgan is home, he comes down to the dining room to find his Mom, Dad, and their campaign manager sitting at the table, each thumbing through a newspaper, with 10 more papers laying on the table.

Morgan says, “Hi everyone!” and everyone’s response is to turn the page of the paper they’re holding. Then discuss what which paper is saying what about their chances of reelection. Before exchanging papers between themselves.

It doesn’t take long to realize why Morgan’s been shipped off to boarding school, because he has to act out to get his parents attention. It’s also not hard for us to understand that newspapers in the breakfast scene are not the villain in the film, just like when you apply this logic to the animated video, you can understand that the smartphones, tablets, or technology is not a villain either.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, we see how Jesus also teaches us how it is not the objects outside of ourselves that are destructive, but our internal desire that causes us to sin.

It is this desire inside us, that uses those objects outside our selves, that vilifies those objects, like technology. In the video short, it isn’t the smartphone that becomes the culprit, it is the desire inside us to be loved and liked by others around us, that is the culprit.

The smartphone is just the tool that is used to fulfill the desire. We we want others to affirm our beauty, we often take a selfie, with our hair all done up, and our fancy, church clothes on, believing this reflects our inner beauty. Then the more likes we get, the more we want others to think we live like this all the time, so we have to regenerate these idealized, or fanciful, images and events, over and over. As to continuously affirm our beauty.

But, if we have a post that isn’t as liked as others, our spirit deflates, and questions if people have moved on from us like yesterday’s newspaper.

I love to travel! We used to drive out to New York State when I was younger to visit family, or up north with my parents to visit all these mythical places my Dad would tell me about. Last summer we camped up in Mackinaw with my Dad, and he guided our tour around the U.P. showing the kids all these places of legend.

And it’s not that these places aren’t majestical, but every state has sites that create awe and wonder; that have epic myths and history behind them. I know my Dad love these places, not because they are the best on Earth, but because that is where his dad took him on family vacations when he was my kids age. My father’s emotional attachment to these destinations have idealized them in his mind.

If you spend any time at all watching college sports, you always see commercials sponsored by the competing universities that tell of their history, and modern advancements to compel prospective applicants, or build emotional attachment to their campus. To invest some portion of our lives into the university.

When you see how tourist attractions and universities work in this way, a way that builds emotional attachment off of myth and traditions, you can see, probably in your own lives, how exterior people, places, or objects become sacred and idolized.

Attachment and desire are ways that bond us to lifestyles and world views that, in and of themselves, are not sinful, but when idolized or prioritized above our mission of the Kingdom, they lead us away from God.

When certain types of automobiles, or houses, consumer goods will only do, because they fit a glamorous lifestyle of, or so we can imitate celebrities, we have to examine our motives.

When we live our lives and make our decisions based off of financial or social intimidation and security, whether real or imaginary, we have to wonder where our desires come from.

Just before today’s New Testament Scripture reading, James says, “No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.”

Exterior objects lure and entice only when there is a desire inside us. Cigarettes are unhealthy, but, so are too many donuts. Cigarettes don’t lure or entice me like donuts do. So, to claim some sort of spiritual superiority because I can easily abstain from tobacco, when I crumble in front of a plate full of donuts, would be folly.

Our social, emotional, or spiritual desires differ, but we all have them. So it would be a mistake to claim a moral or spiritual accomplishment because you are not drawn to one vice, because we are surely drawn to another.

A few years back, Brianne and I realized that even though I love to travel, I have an unhealthy anxiety built into traveling. I have an unhealthy fear of the car breaking down, and us being stranded. Even today, with smartphone technology, and instant access to help, I feel my muscles tense just thinking about it. So everytime we travel, I have this immense drive to hurry up and get to our destination, so I can relax from my stress of the drive. But what Brianne points out is, my anxiety to hurry up, causes everyone else stress.

This eruption of stress, actually became the sign that revealed to me the anxiety of, not traveling, but being stranded. This negative in my life became a positive, by revealing a fear in me that caused great damage.

Smartphones and technology in the animated short work in a way that show us where our desires and fears are. When do we retreat to our smartphones? Why do we retreat to our smartphones? Or, when do we overeat? When do we reach for a drink? When do we get angry?

All these events can teach us something about our desires and fears, so we can see what needs correcting in our souls. We can learn about what pulls us away from Kingdom living, so Christ can direct us into abundant life.

Our spiritual, social, and emotional desires are what motivates us to action. And people have a tendency to reuse the same object to act out these desires. When people enter one abusive relationship after another, or abuse substances, or stonewall and shutdown, go into hiding in the bedroom.

All these responses reveal that there is some pain or anxiety that is inside us, that needs to examined. When men abuse women, or act violently towards animals, it’s not the woman or dogs fault that you are violent, the anger and violence is inside you. The actions of the woman or dog might have triggered that response in you, but make no mistake, it’s in you, or me.

As we enter this new season of our lives, and as we look into the scriptures for direction, let us also look into our lives and the emotions that spring forth, so that we may see and learn what it is that the Holy Spirit is teaching us and telling us that may need another look. Let us also humbly pray that we will be able to see, and recognize the next generous and good gift that God is looking to give us. Because often this gift is difficult or hard, it may come in a trial or tribulation, but let us be patient as to see that it is the next generous and good gift given by our Faithful God. Amen.