

Natalie W. Bell
 March 1, 2026
 2nd Sunday Lent

Jesus Is With Us
Matthew 4:1-11

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness **to be tested by the devil.** ²He **fasted** forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³**The tempter came and said to him,** “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become **loaves** of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written,*

*‘One does not live by bread alone,
 but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”*

⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, **throw yourself down,** for it is written,*

*‘He will command his angels concerning you,
 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
 so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”*

⁷*Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘**Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**’ ”*

⁸*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will **fall down and worship me.**” ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*‘Worship the Lord your God,
 and **serve only him.**’ ”*

¹¹*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist,
 Jesus is led, **by the Holy Spirit**—into the wilderness
 to be tested and tempted by Satan himself.
 He fasts for 40 days and nights, leaving him hungry and alone.

Jesus is basically re-living the story of Israelites in the wilderness,
 Those 40 years after they were rescued from slavery in Egypt,

When they wandered in the wilderness,
and were tested and tempted there.

Jesus is getting ready for public ministry.

But before he begins,

He is tempted three times:

First, to turn **stones into bread**—satisfying his own **hunger**.

Second, to **throw himself off** the Temple—to test God’s **protection**.

Third, to **bow down to Satan**—in order to gain **ultimate power**.

Author Diana Butler Bass, In her book, *A Beautiful Year*,

Says that all these temptations were really ONE—

Jesus was being tempted **to become the new Caesar**.

In the Roman occupation, Jews had to rely upon Caesar for

bread, protection and power to control everything around them.

And you know who was officially called “Lord and Savior”?

That’s right—Caesar.

So Jesus is tempted to step into the role so many expected him to take—
the role of a King, a Warrior, a new Caesar.

And Jesus, said NO.

Instead, he chose the way of humility, service, and ultimately, the cross.

No wonder so many turned away from his sacrificial way of life.

I wonder----Would WE follow him if he showed up today?

Jesus three temptations are that same temptations

That God’s people faced in the wilderness!

They were tempted by **hunger** in Exodus 16.

They were tempted to **doubt God’s faithfulness** in Exodus 17

And they were tempted to **make their own gods**, in Exodus 32.

Why is this so important?

Well, it shows the **UNIVERSAL nature** of being tempted, and tested.

We are ALL tempted to rely upon ourselves—

to meet our own needs, to protect ourselves, and to be in control.

Jesus was truly being one of us,
fully human, when faced with these temptations.

And the way he PASSES the test is important.

Satan knows scripture really well

(a reminder when someone is quoting it to you for bad purposes)

But Jesus knows it, ***in order to serve and LOVE God.***

To LIVE it.

Jesus tells Satan we don't live by bread alone,

we shouldn't test God,

and we are called to worship only God.

LENT is often described as a wilderness time—

when we purposely walk into the wilderness of life, with God,

And we learn what it means ***to trust in God, alone.***

Not ourselves, but God.

Our Matthew Lenten devotional on Day 7 has this great line:

Lent exposes what we TRUST most.

Isn't that the truth?

Every day we are faced with temptations to rely on ourselves,

The question is: are we PASSING the test?

This is why people fast and pray

and confess and repent during Lent,

As reminders to be dependent upon God.

We might like to think that we ***earned all our money*** single-handedly
with hard work....but we didn't.

We might like to think that we can ***protect ourselves***, but we can't.

We might like to think that we are ***in control*** of our lives, but we aren't.

You know who has ultimate power and control?

Only GOD.

So why don't we try trusting in GOD—instead of OURSELVES?

It's definitely EASIER to trust ourselves, isn't it?

We know our strengths and weaknesses, right?

We can rely upon our confidence, or our intelligence, our empathy or our financial savvy, you know?

But we are fallen, broken human beings.

And the thing about us

is that the place of our ***greatest strength***

is often the place of our ***greatest weakness***.

The place of ***greatest temptation***.

So we NEED God.

We REALLY need God, more than we know.

And you know what?

JESUS is there to help us.

He stands with us and for us in the wilderness.

He encourages us to ***trust in God, and God alone***.

Not ourselves!

He walks with us through the wilderness,

Helping us along the way.

If we are going to face hardship or temptation—***JESUS is the key***.

JESUS is our help.

Many of our African American brothers and sisters

have understood trusting God in ways that are different from white Christians.

Enslaved people turned to faith in Jesus and singing spirituals,

Much like the ones we are singing today—*Precious Lord, and Swing Low--*

To just make it through a day—

often days of unspeakable torture and pain endured as slaves,

or ripped apart from family members, or considered less than human.

And civil rights leaders often turned to Jesus, and singing,

And preaching---to make it through times

when our nation was in the business
of oppressing and silencing and hurting black Americans.
When freedom and equality were NOT available
for those with black skin.

***Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of those who led a people,
a movement and a nation to a better place.***

And he did it as a Christian, as a person of faith, as someone relying on God.
It was his faith that helped him resist violence and revenge.

He worked to bring us to a place

where we can resist temptation---
We resist relying upon ourselves,
protecting ourselves,
And claiming power for ourselves.
And instead, we rely on God.

PASTOR KAREN PREACHES:

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached amazing Bible based
sermons in his career.

There are 4 major ones studied by Biblical scholars and seminarians
every year. (LIST?) Memphis, Montgomery, I Have A Dream, Mountaintop

Here is one preached at an Anabaptist church... that was preached 63
years ago still rings as real today as it was then.

The gospel pericope was the temptation of Jesus. Even though it was
preached from the Lukan passage- we can look at it in terms of Matthew's
passage as well.

He called the first temptation "Bread problem."

It is a bread problem. It is the desire to end poverty with a purely
external solution. Jesus said that man cannot live by bread alone
because He know that human problems are not just external but rooted in
spiritual matters as well.

Jesus knew that "if we learn the other words that proceed from the mouth
of God --- love, brotherhood, justice equality---then the bread problem,
poverty will be solved."

The second temptation, to be rescued by angels after jumping from the pinnacle of the temple, calls attention to a temptation that Dr. King said, "every nation faces in every generation" to consider it self exceptional.

"America says we are the richest nation in the world... and so we can drop off the pinnacle of international relationships and...the universe will make an exception on America's behalf because we are special.. " Dr. King said.

The final temptation-- to rule the world in exchange for worshipping Satan-- was a real test, Dr. King said, because Jesus wanted the whole world to hear his message.

This temptation tests "every man and every woman, in every generation" because Satan offers a shortcut: "Use my methods, and I'll help you get the ends that you seek."

Immoral means cannot bring about morality, destructive means can't bring constructive ends.

There is a voice saying, you have a good end in mind-- integration, ending poverty plus equality, justice-- why don't you use violence to get there?"

"But we must say, 'Get behind me, Satan!' for if we succumb to the temptation to use violence and bitterness as the means of our struggle for freedom, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate nightmare of bitterness and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of violence and chaos..."

He concludes "In the midst of all we are experiencing in this country right now, there is enough in the daily news cycle to anger all of us... We must make sure to keep our means as just as the ends we seek. We have to continue to wage peace if we want to seek peace in the world..."

Final statement was

"Be mindful of the temptations our Lord and Savior experienced so that you, like Christ, will pass the test with an A plus."

NATALIE CONCLUDES:

So, my friends, how can we pass the tests we face?

How can we resist temptation?

There's really only ***ONE way***:

We trust in God.

We turn our lives over to God.

We ask Jesus to be our ***provider, sustainer***, and our ***leader***.

May we all turn to God as we walk through the wilderness of Lent.

And for this opportunity, all God's people can say together, Amen.