

**Matthew 4.1-11**  
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**Matthew 4.1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness  
to be tested by the devil.  
He fasted forty days and forty nights,  
and afterward he was famished.  
The tempter came and said to him,  
"If you are the Son of God,  
command these stones  
to become loaves of bread."  
But he answered, "It is written,  
'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city  
and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,  
saying 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.' "

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written,  
'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain  
and showed him  
all the kingdoms of the world  
and their glory,  
and he said to him,  
"All these I will give you,  
if you will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him,  
"Away with you, Satan! for it is written,  
'Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.' "

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

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Jesus climbs up  
out of the river,  
water streaming  
off his face and body,  
and the sound of  
that voice from heaven

still thrumming in his ears,  
 "This is my son, the beloved,  
 with whom I'm well pleased!"  
 Who would not be  
 freaked out by that?

He doesn't even take time to dry off  
 before he runs away  
 into the wilderness,  
 alone.  
 Doesn't ask if anyone else heard it,  
 or what they might think about it.  
 He just escapes the  
 stares and curiosity  
 of the crowd  
 to be alone  
 with his fears and doubts —  
 and his temptations.

For forty days  
 he wrestles  
 with his own questioning spirit.

*Are you really God's own child?  
 That's crazy; look at you!  
 You're miserable!  
 Hungry!  
 If you really are God's child, you could  
 turn these stones to bread  
 and eat!  
 Why not?  
 You could even solve world hunger —  
 turning stones everywhere into bread!  
 You'll be the bread king!*

*And how about this?  
 Are you really God's beloved?  
 Are you sure?  
 Don't you want some guarantee —  
 some sign to convince you?  
 Then you'll be confident.  
 Oh! You could do a test?  
 You could jump off something high!*

If you're so beloved  
     the angels won't let you really fall!  
         They'll catch you!  
             Then you'll know for certain.  
 And, oh, if you jump off  
     the top of the temple  
         where everyone else will see,  
             they'll be certain too.

Wait, if you really are  
     God's beloved child,  
         you should have some status,  
             some glory.  
 You could grab up  
     all the power of the world —  
         for yourself.  
 (And use it for good, of course,  
     but what's the harm  
         in you benefitting too?)  
 Come on, just take  
     all your amazing potential  
         and turn it in  
             toward yourself.  
 Make everything about  
     "me, me, me!"  
         No one will be able to stop me!"

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If anything could demonstrate  
     Jesus' humanity,  
         it's these temptations.  
             Yes, this beloved  
                 child of God  
                     is fully human.  
 With the same hunger,  
     the same physical needs,  
         the same appetites  
             for power and glory  
                 as you and I have.  
 The same fear of inadequacy  
     and need to prove ourselves.  
 The same doubt in ourselves,  
     that we could ever

be good enough really to  
to carry the identity  
"beloved child of God."

And that's the point.

We *aren't* qualified.

We are inadequate when it comes  
to facing our fears, doubts,  
and temptations.

We have to  
wrestle with them  
personally.

Jesus really does

have to face and reject  
all these fears and doubts  
and temptations for himself —  
on his own.

God doesn't intervene

and save him from  
these 40 days of anguish.

Once he overcomes it all,  
then, the angels suddenly show up.

It's as if the angels

are waiting and watching  
just beyond  
the edge of the wilderness  
for the exact moment  
when they can rush in  
and help him recover.

But his struggle

has to be met with faith.

Our struggles with fear and doubt  
and temptations

have to be met with faith.

Someone very wise

recently said

in a Lenten devotional, that,  
the opposite of faith isn't doubt  
it's certainty,

and quoting Anne LaMotte,

"certainty is missing the point entirely."

Even Jesus has to

struggle and question and doubt

and be afraid —  
 and be tempted to grab  
 for cheap power or status.

Here's why Jesus is tempted by all this,  
 because he lives in a world  
 in which bread kings  
 have their way with the markets  
 and appropriate as much as can  
 to hoard wealth.

He lives in a world in which  
 theatrics gain attention  
 and attention amasses influence.

It's a world in which those, who *can*,  
 will wield power in such a way  
 that they can manipulate  
 political take-overs,  
 invade other nations and lands,  
 and occupy them  
 in the name of empire.

And then claim their superior status  
 is a divine right from God.  
 More than one emperor  
 has claimed the title, "Son of God".

We live in that same world.  
 All these conditions for temptation exist for us too.

Maybe we all should be  
 freaked out when,  
 faces wet with baptismal water,  
 we consider that  
 we also have been  
 claimed by God  
 as God's own children.

Every Sunday,  
 we're fed and nourished  
 by God's sustaining presence  
 in the Word and at the Table,  
 then we're sent out beyond  
 that baptismal font,  
 to do God's work  
 with our hands.

We walk out of here into  
 the wilderness places of our lives  
 and are bombarded by all the  
 voices inside us and  
 all around us  
 voices that would incite us to fear,  
 to doubt God's  
 presence and provision —  
 voices that would tempt us  
 to exploit whatever power  
 or influence  
 or office we might hold  
 and grasp on to  
 whatever we can get  
 in the way of  
 security,  
 influence,  
 and power.

The world will always be pressing  
 against the edges of our faith,  
 and that's exactly where  
 God's sustaining presence is —  
 right there in full angel chorus.

Here's the thing though,  
 Jesus comes back  
 from the wilderness.  
 He reengages the world.  
 He approaches the world  
 with his hands open,  
 not for taking but for giving  
 — for giving himself away.

He opens his hands to help  
 people who are sick,  
 to restore people  
 to community and wholeness of life.

He feeds hungry people  
 bread and fish aplenty  
 and leaves them with all the leftovers.

He opens his heart to love,  
 not just his family,  
 not just his friends,  
 but those who oppose him,

who scheme against him,  
who consider themselves his enemies.  
He loves them all,  
not judging anyone  
but teaching us all how to live  
fully alive  
in loving communion with God  
and with each other.

Jesus then goes on  
to empower other people  
to do the same thing —  
to face down their temptations  
and open their hands  
to God's sustaining presence  
and to the world around us.  
Yes, even this same world.  
And in that way,  
we all, with our faces wet,  
become conduits  
for God's sustaining  
the whole world.