

**The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for February 22, 2026**  
**Matthew 4:1-11 – "Temptations in the Wilderness"**

Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the Triune God. Amen.

Not long after his baptism, Jesus is sent out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. This wilderness is not just a physical location, but also a spiritual one. It is here that Jesus will be tested three times by the tempter, the deceiver, Satan. First, Jesus is tempted to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread. The deceiver is misleading Jesus into using power for himself rather than trust in God to provide. The recognition of being provided for, particularly recalling God's provision of manna in the wilderness, the knowledge of God's provision in the direst of times, in the most unexpected and overwhelming circumstances, is what Jesus carries forward and does throughout his ministry.

Next, God's protective grace is tested as Jesus is tempted to use power to secure himself from injury and death. But Jesus refuses to misuse his power and he knows that the tempter is using scripture out of context to try and convince Jesus to test God's protective grace. Finally, the tempter attempts to seduce Jesus with domination and prestige by offering him control over all the world's kingdoms in exchange for his allegiance. Jesus has no interest in earthly empires. Jesus is bringing God's kingdom to earth.

Jesus' temptations are our temptations still. Though none of us are tempted to turn stone to bread, and hopefully none expect to survive jumping off a building, we are still tempted to pursue other paths to wealth, influence, and power. We are still tempted to seek short cuts, ignore God's will, and pursue goals that promise fulfillment, but only lead to emptiness.

Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgements we make about strangers or friends who make choices we don't understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to turn away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease.

The temptations we all face, day by day and at critical moments of decision and vocation in our lives, may be very different from those of Jesus, but they have exactly the same points. They are trying to distract us, to turn us aside, from the path of servanthood to which our baptism has commissioned us.

But as Jesus has taught us, we need to trust that God will provide for us, to understand that we don't need to throw ourselves off a cliff to prove to everyone that God will protect us, and to know that we move about in the world in the promise that God's kingdom has come near.

As we head into our annual meeting, let's remember how Jesus turned away the tempter, keeping his faith and trust in God. When we are dealing with the business of the church, especially considering the budget we will be discussing, it can be easy to lose sight of God, to lose faith in the path that God has for us, or to leave God out of the conversation completely. But Jesus has shown us that even through our doubts and fears, God will be walking with us. If we keep our hearts turned towards God, we can achieve anything and everything.

Immediately after Jesus came out of the wilderness, he began his ministry. Whenever we emerge from our wilderness experience, we are called to do the same. Finding our way out of the wilderness means that we have accomplished our trial, leaning on God. Jesus made it through to the other side of his wilderness journey, and so will we. May it be so.

Amen.