The Temptation of Jesus Matthew 4: 1-11
Feb 22, 2026 Jesse Blaine

Good evening everyone, it's good to see you and I want to welcome you again to **Christ the King Anglican Church**. And as you could probably tell by the new liturgy and a few changing things, that we are in a new season together called the **season of Lent**. And if you haven't had a chance to look at this guide that we printed out—I won't read it all for you—it gives us an overview of: what is Lent and why are we celebrating it? Lent is a season where we focus together, not just as individuals but as a people and as a group, of being reoriented and focusing and turning our minds and our hearts to the Lord. And there's two phrases here that it says here: "The purpose of Lent is renewed joy in the resurrection of Jesus and hope in our future resurrection." Why does the church observe Lent? To reenter our lives as a **pilgrim people**, placing our hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we journey together; and so we are always striving to throw off sin and to put on the goodness of God. We're always doing that as a people, but Lent is a season where we do that with greater intentionality, not just as individuals but also as a group of people together seeking him.

So this is what we're doing; this is why we're celebrating; this is why we're seeking him together during this season. And during the season of Lent we go through a series of readings which follow Jesus as he walks from the mount of transfiguration, which we heard about last week, all the way up to **Golgotha**, the mount where he was crucified, and then to his resurrection. And it's this journey down together with Jesus and then up into Jerusalem, and each week we're going to look at different gospel readings that show us about the life of Christ and reveal to us things mostly about how we can be formed into the very life of Jesus Christ himself.

So this evening we're going to be in **Matthew chapter 4**. If you all could turn in your Bibles there, we're going to be looking at the passage here where Jesus is tempted. And like most passages about Jesus, this is operating on two levels; this is operating in two ways: there's what we see on the face value, right in front of us, and then there's something deeper going on. So on the face value this is an account about temptations, about how we can face temptations, how Jesus is an example for us to respond to those temptations. But also on a deeper level, it's an account that reveals to us more about who Jesus is and, in revealing to us more about who Jesus is, reveals to us more about who we are to become in Jesus Christ. So this account isn't just about avoiding temptations; it is that—it does give us tools in our own lives about how we can avoid temptations—but more deeply it's revealing to us who Jesus is and who he wants us to be.

Now in 1972 there was a famous experiment; it's one that I'd like to run now with all of our kids here, but there's a famous experiment and kids, tell me what you would do here if you were in this situation. It was originally run with a marshmallow, but then it was run time and time again with **Skittles**. I've seen it run with Skittles a bunch of times, so I'm just going to say it's a Skittles. So it's an experiment where they take kids, they put them in a room, and then they put one Skittles in front of the kids and then they say: "If you wait, if you wait there will be three to five Skittles for you on the other side or you can have the same Skittles right now." And you've probably seen this on TV; they've done this where they show the kids squirming and trying to

figure out what to do to deal with this temptation. Some of the kids just grab the Skittles right away; other kids are sort of like punching themselves. One kid I saw in one of the videos was like licking the Skittles but not actually having the Skittles; they're doing all sorts of things. And then the kids that waited, of course, they got five Skittles; the kids that didn't wait, they had that one Skittles.

And of course, the moral of the story is what they did is they followed these kids throughout their lives longitudinally. So they did the experiment when they were four years old and then they followed them all through their lives, and they found that the kids who could wait typically had better life outcomes for the rest of their lives. They typically did better in school; they typically had a more stable home life later in life. And what it revealed was, first of all, what was inside of the children in terms of how they dealt with temptations; but more deeply, as the studies went on, it spoke more deeply about the lives of these children. Were these children from homes where they could trust the words of their parents and adults? Were these children from places that dealt with food insecurity, so they might as well grab what's in front of them now versus being able to wait? So it was in one sense a little bit about the willpower of the children for sure, each as individuals, but more deeply it spoke to the lives of these children and the environment that they came from.

In other words, it wasn't about the Skittles; it was about what the Skittles revealed. In our own lives it's not just about the temptation for Jesus Christ, it's not just about the temptation; it's about what the temptation actually reveals. It's like these temptations are windows into our souls. And so for you here today, it's not just about avoiding seeing the wrong things on your computers or avoiding gossip or avoiding hyper-criticism or jealousy or all the negative vices of the world. It's of course good to avoid those things and to develop behaviors and patterns to protect yourselves from these temptations; that of course is important. But it's not just about that; more deeply it's about what these temptations reveal about what's in our hearts, what's in our minds, what's in our souls, and what is our experience together with God. Temptations ultimately reveal to us the state of our souls: do we trust the father? Do we trust his word to us? Do we have **spiritual food insecurity** to where we have to grasp what's right in front of us rather than trusting the wholeness and the fullness of what God gives us? Can we live with a vision of a future joy in all of our lives? That's what this reveals to us.

We know from the scriptures that Jesus does meet us in this time of trial and temptation to help us resist, but more deeply Jesus reveals to us who he is and what he came to do. So let me pray for us and then we'll move into the passage here. Lord, do give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand who you are, how you serve us, how you walk with us. We thank you Lord that you are with us and that you do not leave us alone in the time of temptation, but you meet us. Reveal to us, Lord, the goodness that you have, the will that you have for our own good and the good of the world through how you guide us in your scriptures. Bless us in your great and holy name we pray, amen.

So again we're in **Matthew chapter 4**. This is an account that's familiar to many of you; it's probably confusing also to many of you because Jesus goes out into the desert and he is driven out in the desert by the spirit here in verse one. So we know immediately that this isn't

haphazard, it's not by accident, but Jesus in obedience to the Holy Spirit is set into a place of wilderness where there's lack and need and it's there that he experiences temptation. And we see him have three interactions with Satan here. All three are temptations that to us seem pretty weird, by the way. He's in the desert for 40 days, sort of like the 40 days of Lent that you'll read about on this brochure—interesting how that works. So Satan comes to Jesus. Verse two it says he was out in the wilderness and after fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry. Pretty obvious observation there. And he says: "If you are the son of God, command these stones." Satan says: "Command these stones to become loaves of bread."

So in Jesus's humanity and hunger Satan comes and tempts him, but the strange thing of course is: what's wrong with turning stones into bread? There's no law against it. In fact, didn't Jesus turn loaves into more loaves into more loaves into more loaves to feed 5,000? What's so wrong with turning stones into bread? I can't say I've ever been tempted in this way personally, maybe you have, but in Jesus's answer we see it reveals to us what's behind the temptation. Jesus says: "**Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God**." And when he says this the reference here is to **Deuteronomy chapter 8**, which I'll just read here for your context. Says this: "And you shall remember the whole way." This is when the Israelites are out in the desert in their own wilderness for 40 years. It says this, Moses is speaking to them: "And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, and he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the man the word of the Lord."

So notice the frame here in what Satan asks him. Satan goes to Jesus and says: "If you are the son of God, then..."—that's the frame. "If you were the son of God then you would turn these stones into bread." And Jesus says: "Actually I am the son of God." And actually being the son of God is not about asserting your own power; it's not about using everything at your disposal to create your own comfort. That being a true son of God is about formation, about being built up, about feeding on what most deeply matters, not about meeting every need that we have on a whim.

Now again this speaks to us on a deeper level because if you heard in the Romans reading, **Romans chapter 5**, it says: "Through the one man sin entered into the world and through one man salvation came to the world." And what Paul is doing is he's comparing Jesus to Adam and he says Jesus is actually the **new Adam**. And theologically what he's actually saying is that Jesus came to show us what the reality of humanity is supposed to look like; that we are all sons and daughters of God and as we look at the life of Jesus and how he acted and lived and moved through the world filled by the Holy Spirit, he's revealing to us who we are in the fullness of our own humanity. He's revealing what humanity was before sin came and took it away; he's revealing a renewed humanity to all of us. So when Jesus says: "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word," what he's saying is all of us who are in Christ we live by the very word of God; we're guided by him, we're led by him into the truth that he has for us. This is what it reveals to look like for us.

Now for us this temptation lands in our own lives when we feel any sense of lack, any sense of desire for something more or better in our lives. We want more comfort, or we're lacking food, or we're lacking something financially, or some sort of approval from the people around us, or we just take stock of our life and you say: "You know, whatever life is supposed to be, this just doesn't... this just isn't it. This isn't what I was made for; I was made for more; I want more out of my life." And so when we feel a gap between what we think life should be and what we want and what's right in front of us, this is where this temptation meets us. And the question that we have to ask is: will we secure ourselves with our own power or will we trust the father to provide for us?

I heard a great tactic that they're using in **Finland** of all places to help with my own problem, which is grabbing my phone too often. So just whenever I'm bored or anything, I just grab my phone. Nothing necessarily wrong with it, but I just grab my phone, grab my phone, grab my phone. And I have too many phone pickups during the day, and my daughters in the room say "Amen dad, you have way too many." And so what they're doing in Finland in the schools is they instituted this thing where they said: "Kids, before you pick up your phone, first count to 10 and then name the reason why you're picking up that phone." And among 14 to 16 year olds they found an 80% reduction in phone usage during school just with that one little technique. Well I want to steal that technique and I want to apply it to our own hearts and our own souls as you go through your life and you feel lack, you feel some sort of hunger, you feel a discomfort, you feel a need, you feel a desire that you want to just go ahead and meet or satiate right away: do the same thing. Count to 10, literally count to 10, and name what is the root desire here. What is the root desire that I'm reaching for that I maybe don't trust God to meet me in this desire? What is the root need that I look to satiate that maybe I'm not trusting the Lord to meet me in? Name it and pray about it. So whatever happens—you don't get a promotion at work, you're not included in an invitation, you hear bad news about AI or bad news in the world and you feel something sort of turn in you—count to 10, name what you're feeling, and bring it to the Lord. This is how God encourages us to look to him; this is how Jesus looked to him.

So that's the first temptation. Second temptation, as the passage goes on, it says in verse five: "Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the son of God...'"—again there's that framing. "Jesse, if you want a really good life, if you want to be entertained, Jesus, if you're the son of God throw yourself down and God will command his angels and they will come and catch you for he will not let your foot be hurt or damaged." He says: "Throw yourself down, you'll be fine." And again the temptation is not something that I've had my own self where I would throw myself off a building, you know, strap on a GoPro, make an awesome video, post it on the internet, get... go viral. This is not a temptation I've ever had. What could be so wrong? In fact, what could be so wrong with Jesus doing it? In fact, wouldn't everybody who sees it go: "Wow, the angels caught this guy and they brought him to the ground, this must be the Messiah." Wouldn't this be an easier, faster way to show people who he really was and sort of quiet these Pharisee guys who are pesky and bothering him? What's the big deal; what's wrong with this temptation?

Again we see in the answer that Jesus gives us the deeper reason behind it. Jesus says again it is written: "**You shall not put the Lord your God to the test**." And here again he goes to the

scriptures; he goes back to Deuteronomy and he goes into a time where the Israelites are wandering through the wilderness. And it says they were thirsty and they were hungry and they begin to grumble and they say in effect: "God, we've followed you now you owe us; prove you're with us, provide for us in this specific way." That's the test—not hunger, not thirst—but there's this presumption that the nation of Israel has in the book of Deuteronomy there where they put the Lord their God to the test. They say: "God, I am the judge and I'm going to judge your actions before me and you have to stand before me while I judge you." This is the temptation of presumption upon the Lord.

Now for us this happens when we feel like God owes us something, and when we feel like God owes us something we're acting in the same way as the Israelites: we are putting ourselves as judge over God. We're saying things to God like: "God, I've done all these things for you; I've come to church, I've honored you, I've sacrificed in this many ways; God, you owe me this blessing; why aren't you showing up in the way that I want you, when I want you, with the specific things that I want?" Now sometimes we do this overtly; I might say: "God, I've given you myself and my family to this ministry, you owe me fruit and joy right now." Most of the times though we do this by projection: we take something that we want, we wrap it up in spiritual bandages and we say: "God, I've done all these things... you... these are the expectations I have for you." And then when the expectations don't come to fruition we're left grumbling, we're left judging God, saying: "God, why didn't you meet me in this way?" And just as any good premarital counselor would say: "**Expectations are just premeditated disappointments**." Whenever we build up expectations for God and we're let down, we can grumble and complain just like the Israelites did in Deuteronomy 6. Jesus says: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test; do not enter into presumption." Jesus shows us that the true son of God, the true daughter of God, unlike Adam or Eve or Israel, unlike us, does not presume upon God but trusts him.

Last temptation, verse eight. Here 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 to you if you fall down and worship me." And the temptation that we see here is wanting the right thing but getting it in the wrong way. So it is the right thing that Jesus would rule; it's the right thing that he would reign. In fact you can think about the temptation: "Jesus, think about all the things you could do if you were in charge: you could help the poor, you could bring justice, people would finally see that you were meant to be king. I'm offering this to you, Jesus; this is all that I'm giving you if you just bow down to me. I will give you all the kingdoms, all the things that you were meant to get anyways I am going to give to you if you just bow down and worship me. And also by the way you wouldn't have to go through the cross to get it; you wouldn't have to go through the suffering and the pain to get it. I offer you this right here right now—just bow and you can do everything that you were meant to achieve." Doesn't it even say in the Bible that you were meant to be king? Here it is for you right now. So it is sort of the right thing, but it's achieving it in the wrong way. And Jesus says we bow only to God and we honor him only; we follow him only even if there are pathways that seem like they're easier and faster to get to the right things. We turn our lives only to him instead of idolatry or worshiping anything else.

So for us the temptation is to ask the question: to whom are we giving our own souls and whom are we hoping for the things that we want in this life and in the world around us? Are we hoping

in a political party or a cultural posture or a curated life where everything is perfectly optimized for our comforts and needs? What are we bowing to in order to have the right things and the good things but in the wrong way? Jesus says: "Bow only to God and him only." Jesus's response shows us that he knew it was the father's responsibility to worry about the outcome and to trust him for the process and the path.

You see it's never just about the skittle; it always reveals so much more. For us in Jesus God reveals that when temptations come we can turn to him and to the scriptures and to prepare—and to... excuse me—and to prayer in order to push back those temptations. That's very good, but more deeply the temptations always reveal a window into our souls to see: what is it that we most love and most depend upon in our own lives? The life of Jesus, it revealed to us that Jesus is the new Adam; he came to show us what humanity is supposed to look like. He perfectly shows us this not only in his teaching, which is didactic in his... in the words that he gives us, but even more powerfully in the life that he lived where he faced temptations and shows us how to live this way and guides us how we can most profoundly face temptations ourselves.

I love this quote from **St. Augustine** who said this: "In Christ you were tempted, for Christ received his flesh from your nature that by the same nature he might give you salvation. If we have been tempted in him we also overcome the devil in him." In Christ you were tempted, for Christ received his flesh from your nature that by the same nature he might give you salvation. If we have been tempted in him we also overcome the devil with him. This is a shift we have to make from a how-to manual and behavior modification. Again this is good, it has value and purpose, but more deeply we need to see if I'm tempted that we turn to Jesus because in Christ we have victory over all of these things. Because he shows us what new humanity looks like: the perfectly spirit-filled version of our own lives. This is how we have victory over the next Skittles in our life or whatever it is. May God bless us as we walk in this.

Let me pray for us the collect that we heard earlier. Almighty God, whose blessed son was led by the spirit to be tempted by Satan: come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let us each find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, amen. The man.