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Jesus Was Tempted Matthew 4: 1-11

After the baptism and before the beginning of his actual ministry, Jesus withdrew to the wilderness for solitary prayer and deep thought.

But in the wilderness, he did not meet God. Instead, he was tempted by Satan, the symbol of the ultimate enemy of God. The temptation was threefold.

The first temptation was this. "If you are truly the Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread."

In the Bible, bread often symbolizes material wellbeing. Here Satan was saying, "Nothing is more important than material wealth. Nothing else matters. Don't you agree?"

Jesus said, "No." Bread is important. But if you think bread is everything and treat it as such, it becomes the source of evil. Bread or material wealth becomes good when and only when it is shared with others. Jesus said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The second temptation was this. Satan suggested to Jesus "Jump off the pinnacle of the temple and see if God's angels will save you from death."

The temple represented the religious authority of the high priests and scholars of the law. Those religious authorities looked down upon the poor and sick, and all the marginalized people of the land.

In other words, Satan tempted Jesus to legitimize this misuse of religion, to declare that there was nothing wrong with religious discrimination of the poor and oppressed.

Jesus refused to acknowledge this system of domination as the will of God. "Don't be silly," said Jesus to Satan. "You are wrong, and you know it."

The third temptation of Satan was most serious. Satan took Jesus to a high mountain. From there he showed all the kingdoms of the world. "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world and their splendor, if you worship me." Jesus had enough. "Get behind me, Satan."

Now we see the common thread of Jesus' temptation story. Satan is saying to Jesus, "There is no God. There is nothing beyond what you see, hear, and feel. Our empirical world is all we have. Admit that."

Jesus was tempted to abandon his belief in God. Isn't it our temptation also? Isn't it what we go through almost everyday? But the good news is that we need not feel guilty. We need not feel bad, because Jesus himself was tempted by exactly the same temptations.

What is important is this. He resisted Satan not only for himself. He resisted for us. He is our friend, indeed.

But this is not an invitation to complacency. It does not mean we can relax before those temptations. Since Jesus resisted Satan's temptations for us, we are empowered to do the same each and everyday valiantly, courageously.

Of course, we may fall flat on our faces. But Jesus never gives up on us. His words are clear. "Get up. Do not be afraid."

To remember these words of Jesus is to experience his presence with us. He overcame Satan's temptations for us. For us! To be able to declare that in conviction and truth is to experience the peace of Christ that braces us for the living of these days.

Therefore, may the peace of Christ be with you all!

Amen.