

# First Sunday in Lent

## TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

Matthew 4:1-11

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The 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." 5Then 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." 7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, Do not put the Lord your God to the test." 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." 11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Dictating the Terms of Endearment

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Starving in the Wilderness*

There's a deliberate connection being made between Jesus and his predecessors: God declares Israel as his "chosen people" yet they end up wandering and starving in the wilderness for forty years. The Voice from heaven declares Jesus "beloved Son" and now he is in a wilderness, famished (v. 2). We have been declared God's dear children at our baptisms, but often it seems we too starve, maybe not for food but for love, success, wealth, well-being. Israel complained bitterly (Exodus 16:8). We complain about the "jungle" that overwhelms us. But Jesus responds without complaining (vv. 4, 7, 10).

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Dictating the Terms of Endearment**

Seemingly, the Israelites/we think we have grounds for complaint, grounds for questioning God's terms of endearment for us. The rationalization goes thusly: If we are dear to God, then God should behave in such a way as to prove his love for us by turning rocks into bread, saving us when we jump off cliffs, giving us material wealth and satisfaction (vv. 3, 6, 8). [Name your own desperate desire.] We betray this line of thinking deep down. We want to dictate the terms of our filial relationship. We want to determine what is and is not good for us, a trait we inherited from Adam and Eve when they caved in to the first temptation. Worse, we even have the audacity to believe that we can make ourselves endearing to the Heavenly Parent by what we do! In sharp contrast, Jesus is content to trust "every word that comes from the mouth of God" (v. 4) and those who follow God's directive (v. 11).

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Abandoned in the Wilderness**

Usurping God's authority does not endear anyone to God. Au contraire. It provokes his displeasure. Yet God will not argue; he accepts our appropriations and vacates the position. But that is tantamount to being God-forsaken, and we discover that that

is what creates our wilderness. Again, Jesus is different: He refuses to exploit God's terms of endearment, and God responds by sending angels to minister to him (v 11). The only angel Adam and Eve encounter is the one with the flaming sword, who is sent to be sentinel at the garden gate (Genesis 3:24).

## **PROGNOSIS: Accepting Endearment**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Rescuer***

The next angels who minister to Jesus are those who make an appearance at his empty tomb, bearing the announcement that Jesus is not dead but risen (28:6). But before that, Matthew tells us how God had sent Jesus into the human wilderness, how Jesus had willingly accepted the role of Suffering Servant chosen for him, how he took on all the sin and guilt of the God-forsaken, until finally the Father abandoned even him ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"; 27:46). It was exactly that total giving of himself that endeared him most to the Father, who responded by raising him. How ironic that at the point of total abandonment, Jesus is recognized as truly being "the Son of God" (27:54).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Accepting Endearment***

This Beloved Son's death and resurrection become the rescue of all the God-forsaken, and it changes them/us. Overwhelmed by the love of it all and grabbing hold of Jesus, we cast ourselves into the arms of the Heavenly Parent and discover that our trust in his Son now endears us to the Parent! With joy we surrender our struggle for sovereignty, this time glad to accept God's terms of endearment. Like Jesus, when tempted we can say, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" (v. 10).

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Returning to the Wilderness***

The Beloved Son takes us by the hand and includes us in his rescue mission. Even though it's frightening, we return to the wilderness because that's exactly where the God-forsaken can be found, and our hearts ache for their rescue. Our grumbling and complaining are over, replaced by quiet confidence in the One who has endeared us to God. When we starve we find our nourishment in the Word, who is our "bread of life."