

Forty days and forty nights  
You were fasting in the wild;  
Forty days and forty nights  
Tempted, and yet undefiled.

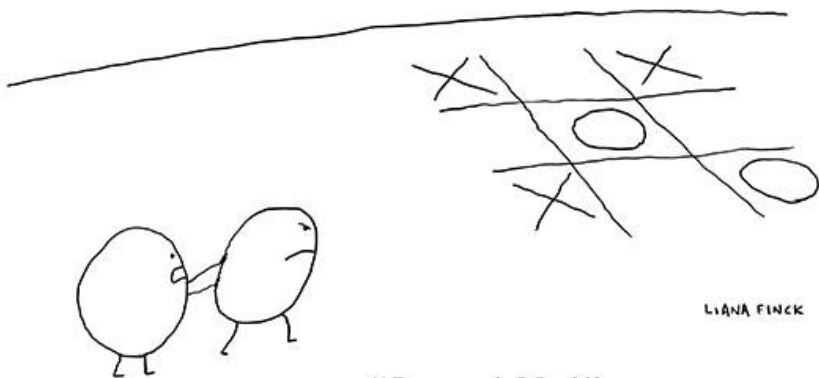
Shall not we Your sorrow share  
And from worldly joys abstain,  
Fasting with unceasing prayer,  
Strong with You to suffer pain?

Then if Satan on us press,  
Flesh or spirit to assail,  
Victor in the wilderness,  
Grant we may not faint nor fail!

So shall we have peace divine:  
Holier gladness ours shall be;  
Round us, too, shall angels shine,  
Such as served You faithfully.

Keep, O keep us, Savior dear,  
Ever constant by Your side;  
That with You we may appear  
At the eternal Eastertide.

George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870)



LIANA FINCK

*“Larry! No!”*



“Christ Ministered to by Angels”

from a French pictorial Bible of St. Omer (c. 1190-1200)

# Monday Morning

## THE TEST

Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test.

The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.”

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.”

For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, “Since you are God’s Son, jump.” The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: “He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won’t so much as stub your toe on a stone.”

Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: “Don’t you dare test the Lord your God.”

For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth’s kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, “They’re yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they’re yours.”

Jesus’ refusal was curt: “Beat it, Satan!” He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.”

The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus’ needs.

Matthew 4, The Message

Save us, O Lord, from the snares of a double mind. Deliver us from all cowardly neutralities. Make us to go in the paths of thy commandments, and to trust for our defense in thy mighty arm alone; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Richard Hurrell Froude (1803-1836)

The desert is the home of despair. And despair, now, is everywhere. Let us not think that our interior solitude consists in the acceptance of defeat. We cannot escape anything by consenting tacitly to be defeated. Despair is an abyss without bottom. Do not think to close it by consenting to it and trying to forget you have consented. This, then, is our desert: to live facing despair, but not to consent. To trample it down under hope in the Cross. To wage war against despair unceasingly. That war is our wilderness. If we wage it courageously, we will find Christ at our side. If we cannot face it, we will never find him.

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 1958

We cannot ignore the negative form in which the righteousness of God appears in the event handed down in these passages. This is unavoidable, because we have to do with it in the wilderness, in the kingdom of demons, in the world unreconciled with God, and in conflict with that world. It is unavoidable because what we have here is a prefiguring of the passion. But in the passion, and in this prefiguring of it, the No of God is only the hard shell of the divine Yes, which in both cases is spoken in the righteous act of this one man. That this is the case is revealed at the conclusion of the accounts in Mark and Matthew by the mention of the angels who, when Satan had left Him, came and ministered unto Him. The great and glorious complement to this at the conclusion of the passion is the story of the resurrection.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1, The Doctrine of Reconciliation*

Every first Sunday of Lent I get reminded of the perils of our baptismal calling. The Spirit descends [at Jesus’ baptism], God speaks and then almost immediately, before we’ve even dried off, the devil makes a counteroffer: Wouldn’t you prefer a shortcut to resources and power? Don’t you want to be affirmed by the masses, afforded status and special treatment? Doesn’t a guarantee of no pain and suffering sound good to you? Beloved child of God is good, but invincibility and limitless wealth, isn’t that much better?

I once had a mentor who said to expect pushback from unexpected quarters when you start down a path you believe to be of God’s leading. Doing the work of the Lord attracts the attention of the devil, he said.

Jill Duffield, “Looking into the Lectionary” — Presbyterian Outlook