



# DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

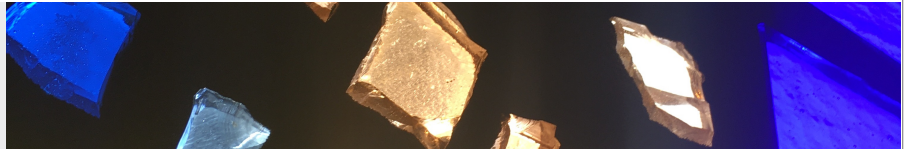
## Week of January 15, 2023 (Matthew 4:1-17)

### Prayer for Groups & Personal Devotion:

In the midst of the bustling city, still there is wilderness. In the profound quiet of the empty glen, still there is power. Not to deserts alone need we wander to find that we wonder about life in its fullness and depth. For there are still-centres to the storms of activity in the busiest places. And some of those still-centres are lonely.

We pray for a world often in wilderness: finding hope in a barren prospect, feeling faith a dusty lie, fearing doubt might just destroy.

Tall questions press, searing truths pierce, and hearts get laid bare. And the temptation is to turn for ease and plenty and safety and distraction: turn life inwards selfishly; chasing hollow dreams, and empty promises.



## Devotions for Life

### The Story: Matthew 4:1-17

**Context:** Last week we were in Matthew 2, looking at the Magi, and the week before we looked at Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3. This week we leap up to Matthew 4 and will work more chronologically from here on out. Matthew 4 is directly connected to what happens in Matthew 3, where John the Baptist proclaims a baptism of repentance; then Jesus comes and claims that he must be baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness"; John baptizes Jesus and as Jesus comes out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends and a voice says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17).

It is immediately after this that the Holy Spirit, which has just descended upon Jesus, leads him into the wilderness "to be tempted by the devil" (4:1). It's important to note that it is only after Jesus is empowered in baptism by the Holy Spirit and his identity is spoken over him that he goes to be tempted. All of this is connected, for if Jesus is to "fulfill all righteousness", he must overcome the temptations that come with such power and such a call.

These temptation narratives only show up in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Matthew and Luke have similar accounts, whereas Mark only mentions it in passing. We don't have a temptation narrative in John for any number of reasons, but chief among them is that Jesus is so entwined with the Father

...Or the temptation is to meet the emptiness with anger, lashing out as if inflicting pain eases the despair felt, and so turn life outwards but again selfishly: chasing a strange salvation at the expense of others' peace.

We pray for the hollow-dream-chasers: confusing moral peace with material plenty, and finding a strange unsettling wilderness. We pray for the lashers out: confusing power with ambition and finding the same strange and unsettling wilderness. Amen.

### Compassion & Justice

This month we are collecting socks and underwear of all sizes and gender identities for the Simpson Shelter in South Minneapolis. One undergarment to consider, which is often overlooked, are chest binders worn by many trans men. Drop off your contributions in the back of sanctuary in worship or on Tuesdays & Thursdays between 9am-3pm. You may



also have them delivered.

in John. that temptation wouldn't make sense. It just wouldn't fit with who Jesus is and how he acts in John.

Finally, note there are three primary words used for the embodiment or manifestation of evil in this text: The "tempter", the "devil", and "Satan". These refer to the same entity, but also have some distinctions. Suffice it to say here, the Bible isn't as clear as tradition may say that it is on just what this entity is. Some believe it is an actual external being, while some believe it's merely a concept. It's ok to have your own understanding, but because we don't really know, we encourage you to approach it with an open mind and hold your understanding loosely.

### Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What phrases, words, or images in this passage stood out to you the most?
2. Why does Jesus go out to the wilderness?
3. How do you picture the "devil" showing up and approaching Jesus? What does the devil look like? Sound like? Is there an actual physical being called the devil?
4. When in your life have you been tempted? Did you give in? Did you resist? If so, what did you do to resist?
5. How do you understand "evil" in this world?
6. What are the three ways Jesus is tempted? How are we tempted in similar ways?
7. How do we overcome evil? What practices do we need to commit to in order to overcome evil?
8. Do you know that even in times when you've given in to temptation, God's love and grace gets the last word in your life, just as it got the first word?