

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent**  
**Matthew 4: 1-11**  
**St James, Shirley 22 February 2026**

**Sermon: Sharing in Worship**

**Lent**

I don't know whether you've been following the first few days of the Draw Near booklet that we're using through this season of Lent, but if you have, you'll have seen that the opening theme is Sharing in Worship. It's a good place to begin, because the word worship conjures up all sorts of different images for people.

For some, worship is simply what we do when we gather here on a Sunday: a service, hymns, prayers, the familiar rhythm of liturgy. For others, worship might mean praise, honour, reverence, bowing before something or someone. It's a broad word.

But the best definition of worship I've ever heard is this:

“Worship is our response to the revelation of who God is”

Worship begins with God, with who God is, and what God reveals of Godself, and then it becomes our response. Our lives, our choices, our priorities, our trust. It's worth holding that in mind as we think about what worship really means, and what it looks like to *live it* rather than simply *do it*.

**Testing**

Lent is a season of responding — reflectively and honestly — to Jesus' call to follow him. It's a time when the Church invites us to pay attention to the areas of life where we are tested, and to practise resisting the temptations that pull us away from God's life for us.

When talking about this subject I am always reminded of the quotation attributed to Oscar Wilde “I can resist everything, apart from temptation”

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And so, at the very start of Lent, we're given this powerful reading from Matthew's Gospel — Jesus in the wilderness — to encourage us as we face our own moments of testing.

And this is where one of the most fascinating and misunderstood figures in Scripture appears: the devil.

Now, “the devil” is only one of the names used. In this passage Matthew uses three: the devil, the tempter and Satan. And the first thing I want to encourage you to do is to put away the cartoon image that probably springs to mind — the red figure with horns, pitchfork and cloven hooves. That image comes from a mash-up of Roman depictions of pagan gods, developed by medieval superstition. It's not what Scripture is doing here.

I'm not dismissing the existence of this adversarial figure — but we do need to approach him as the Bible presents him. And there is a very real thing called evil, but today we're thinking more about testing and temptation.

In Scripture, ‘satan’, originally known as ‘the satan’ simply means “accuser” or “adversary”. It's a title, not originally a personal name. Over time, the figure becomes more developed, more personalised and more sinister. But his role is consistent: to entice, to distort, to accuse, to pull God's people away from their calling.

And in this passage, Jesus allows the adversary to test him. He doesn't dismiss him immediately. He listens to the questions, faces the temptations, and responds, firmly, faithfully and truthfully. If he had given in, the consequences would have been disastrous. But he does stand firm, and in doing so he gives us a pattern and encouragement for our own moments of testing.

Because we will all be tested. That's not the problem. The real issue is how we respond, whether we lose sight of who Jesus is

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calling us to be, or whether we hold fast to the truth of who God is and who we are in him.

And that is the challenge set before us at the beginning of Lent.

**Jesus' response**

Jesus' responses are, in and of themselves, an act of worship. Each time he refuses the easy route to power, comfort, or self-importance; he is choosing to bow to no other voice, no other promise, no other "god" than the Father. Behind each temptation lies something that has drawn countless people to altars over the centuries: the trap of self-reliance, the hunger for control, the desire to be seen, admired, powerful. These are not small things. They are the path to the false gods the Bible warns us about throughout.

But Jesus stands in the wilderness holding the first commandment close to his heart:

"The Lord your God is the only God; worship only him."

He illustrates the message given to Israel all those years before: that God's people were to be shaped into a people of worship, not just by what they did in the Tabernacle or Temple, but by the way they lived together, trusted God and resisted the false gods around them.

And notice how Jesus responds. He doesn't engage in debate. He doesn't negotiate or argue. He simply quotes, again and again, to the truth of who God is and who he is in God, based on Scripture. His worship is not a song or a ritual, it is a solid allegiance. A refusal to let anything, or anyone else define him, satisfy him, or claim his loyalty.

This is worship as a way of life. Worship as an expression of our humanness. This is worship as a daily choosing of God over the

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many other voices that promise quicker, easier and more glamorous paths.

And in doing so, Jesus shows us that resisting temptation is not just about willpower. It is about worship. It is about where we place our trust, our identity, our hunger and our hope. It is about living out that definition we began with:

“Worship is our response to the revelation of who God is.”

### **Discipleship**

Our own places of wilderness and temptation probably won't look anything like the Judean desert. We're unlikely to hear the tempter speak as obviously as Jesus did. But it is surprisingly easy, in our modern world, to find ourselves in a kind of wilderness, places where God feels distant, where our priorities get confused and where the noise of the prevailing culture drowns out the voice that calls us beloved.

It's easy to feel strong in a place like this: gathered together, surrounded by community, upheld by prayer, Scripture and fellowship. But true character is revealed when we are on our own. When no one is watching. When we face the quiet, private choice between worshipping a false god or staying faithful to the God revealed in Jesus.

And those false gods are subtle. They rarely announce themselves. They come disguised as perfectly reasonable desires: success, comfort, approval, control, security, pleasure. None of these things are wrong in themselves but they become dangerous when they start to claim our loyalty, shape our decisions, or define our worth. That is when they begin to function as gods.

And this is where discipleship becomes very real. Because worship is not just what we sing or say — it is what we choose. A show of worship is found in how we use our time, how we spend

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our money, what we commit to, and what we treat as optional. It's seen in the effort we make to pray, to serve, to show up, to be part of the life of the church and its mission. Every one of those choices reveals what — or who — we value most.

**Whole life**

The more we begin to see every act, every decision, every priority as part of our worship — whether we are here in church, at home, at work, or anywhere else — the more we discover that worship is not an event but a way of life. And then we truly begin to understand that sharing in worship is our response to the revelation of who God is. Amen

*Rev'd Richard Haynes 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent*