

**A Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent  
February 22, 2026**



*Illustration by Gustave Dore'*

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[First Sunday in Lent – The Episcopal Church](#)

Matthew 4: 1-11

Who are the devils? Who are the angels?

Norm and I have a small sculpture of evil incarnate from Walt Disney's 1940 animated classic "Fantasia," released just as World War Two was beginning. The large hulking creature holds squirming people in his hand, his eyes glint malevolently, as he summons forth the dark forces on All Hallow's Eve. Many of our primal stories show this face-off between good and evil. Virtually all the fairy tales set up this dichotomy. Our scriptural heritage likewise tells us primal tales to warn us of the dangers of evil. Our first reading is a good example, the ancient folktale of Adam and Eve in the garden. The crafty serpent tells Eve that if she eats the forbidden fruit, her eyes will be opened and she will be like God. Eve takes the bait and has been blamed for all our sins ever since, but it is not really about Eve: It is about the primal struggle between good and evil, and the serpent gets most of the bad press.

So here we are in a similar struggle between Jesus and Satan. The Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness and set up this test. Jesus fasted 40 days and was physically weak and hungry when the devil arrived to tempt him with an easy way out. Their dialog is classic and telling. The devil first works on Jesus' hunger by telling him to just turn the stones into bread, but Jesus rejects this idea as ungodly. The devil tries again by urging Jesus to test God by throwing himself into danger, and he even quotes scripture that God will rescue him. But Jesus isn't buying that false assurance of safety either and refuses to put God to the test. Finally, the devil tries offering Jesus political power – "Here, look at all this! All the kingdoms of the world!" (I think I have heard that one before.) The devil has offered food, safety, and power, and Jesus knows that everything the devil is offering is false hope. "Away with you, Satan!" The devil leaves, and suddenly angels come and wait on Jesus.

Devils and angels. We know that they both beset us. The devils are pretty obvious, although some are as cunning and mischievous as the serpent in Eve's tale. The devil dressed up his arguments with scripture, but Jesus saw through the lies. Will we see through the lies that life presents to us? Can we quote scripture to our purposes and justify everything we do, take, or talk about? Do we cause a lot of our own problems? The theologian Edward Hayes wonders about that in a psalm he wrote for Lent, saying: "Open my heart this day that I may see with eyes of truth whether the painful cross I bear as mine, claiming it as holy burden, does indeed come from you, my God – or if by chance my cross is one of my own creation." (Psalm of My Cross, Prayers of A Planetary Pilgrim, p 189). A good question for contemplation. Perhaps the devil is in all of us. The devil is not always easy to identify.

But wait! In the last sentence of our reading, the angels appear! They are a sign of hope and assurance. If we are honest about the devils, perhaps we can also be honest about the angels.

So – who are the devils? And who are the angels? In our lives, at all levels, in our private lives, in our parish community, in our country? There are many temptations to see situations in black-and-white, when serpents speak on both sides of political questions. In our parish, are we kidding ourselves about our own mission and purpose? In our private lives, have we justified over-indulgence as an enjoyable habit and forgotten the needs of others?

I see here at New Life more angels than devils, in the generosity and love of this parish. But we don't want to rest on our laurels, rather we should continue to strive for the better course. Abraham Lincoln once appealed to our better angels, those who lead the way to charity and truth. During this Lent, let us be aware that we are beset with both devils and angels vying for our attention, and let us strive for a more angelic response to challenge. Angels will be a good balance for the 40 days that stretch out in front of us, bringing us positive examples for our lives.