

Thursday, April 10: Saint Honesty

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<https://open.spotify.com/track/28YMQj2P0m3dvJqgjxLkEq?si=6a9dfc70a56e4e58>

*We're leaving all the windows open;
We don't even mind the rain,
Or where we let the floors get wet,
So what if the hardwood stains? 🍷*

This past year, for me, has been one holy invitation after another to leave the windows of my life open to God's renewing rains of honesty. Perhaps you know, too, what that's like - to be drenched by the seasonal or momentary rains of God's unmasking in your life.

Maybe you had to get really honest with someone you love: to force the subject that had been off limits until it suddenly wasn't anymore, revealing a courage in you that you had no idea you possessed and unearthing a whole new depth of trust.

Or maybe someone who helped make you who you are, who has long held the seat of your respect, was unmasked in all their jarring brokenness to be just as human as you are, ushering in an astonishing, relational reversal that, at first though, felt like disorienting loss.

Or perhaps you've known what it's like to just get really honest with yourself: to force the subject of your own unhealth, or unsustainable choices, or insistence on control, uncovering all those lies you've told yourself, all the harm inflicted, all the balance and connection lost.

However you've come to know Saint Honesty – whether you've been saturated or stained by her rains or are just learning to open the window – I promise you're in good company, as you continue to wade into this 40-day journey of Lent.

*🍷 'Cause we're collecting evidence
Of one remarkable storm.
How wild it was to find it, finally feel the climate
Instead of only staying dry and warm. 🍷*

The season of Lent serves as this invitation into a divine, honest unmasking, both of God and us. It's in this season that the extraordinary reality of who Jesus is is unveiled; that the evil in our midst is exposed; and that we, collecting all the evidence of God and becoming intensely acquainted with the turbulent, destructive climate of our sin and death, are readied for resurrection.

Which might be why I've always had an affinity for the gospel writer Matthew's way of telling the story. Chapter by chapter, Matthew seems to major on the unmasking.

In chapter one, Matthew gets unapologetically honest about Jesus' pedigree, unmasking him with localized, genealogical specificity - not as some hip, new spiritual guru, but as the fulfillment of God's promise to the people called Israel.



Then, in second chapter, the Magi show up, and another mask is removed. Matthew, in unison it seems with Saint Honesty, whispers, "But, hey, psst! Make sure you pay attention, though, because this fulfillment of God's promise to the people called Israel is *also* the Savior to *all* nations." Plot twist.

But, still, Matthew continues to confront us, removing yet another veil obstructing our view of God. As Jesus is baptized and the heavens break open, God shows up palpably and then proclaims in audible voice, "This is my Son," revealing now that the Savior to all nations doesn't arrive, though, to save the world from us; but, instead, *is us*, and *we are him*. God, Emmanuel, *with us*.

Peeling back every pretense, Matthew introduces us ever-so-honestly to the empire-upending paradox of the God we get in Jesus: the one who meets us as a newborn in a slop-trough and refuses to hide his face from us on the cross. And you'd think that this - God's crude with-ness - would be the summation of Matthew's exposé, but it's not.

At the entryway of Jesus's 40-day wilderness journey and at the onset of our own, Matthew lays bare one more dimension to Jesus, this time by way of an encounter with Satan, the Tempter, which Matthew unambiguously emphasizes was *led by the Spirit* - desired and orchestrated by God - in order that Jesus might be tempted.



What a no-holds-barred, theologically provocative, Scriptural moment this is! Matthew has left all the windows open for Saint Honesty to rain, to pour even. It's as if he's warning us that if we really desire to know and follow the God revealed in Jesus, we better be ready for it to land us face to face with our own deepest, veiled temptations. For one of the things that Jesus does like no other is he reveals evil for what it is.

 *Rain on us, Saint Honesty;
Salvation is coming in the morning,
But now what we need is a little rain on our face
From you, sweet Saint Honesty. *

And, I know, it's counter-intuitive and oxymoronic. This kind of honesty isn't sweet; frankly, it's exhausting. It's exhausting to face our temptations. It's exhausting to have to always do battle with the things inside of us and outside of us. That's why it's so easy to escape it or transcend it - especially during Lent - for some kind of ethereal, cerebral, divine Easter moment; but sooner or later the Spirit will lead us to face the things that tempt us most.

And deep down, I know that you know (like I know) that that's good news. Every Sunday we pray together, "Lead us not into temptation," but what we're really asking is that God would lead us

away from the temptation to veil our temptations, from the temptation to run towards blue Easter skies without getting a little Lenten rain on our face, from the temptation to choose ease over honesty.

 *So we won't sleep tonight
While we brace against the wind.
Oh, these hearts, they're weather-makers;
We'll go where they take us
Until we find ourselves shelter again.* 

Deep down we're all yearning to know virtue from temptation. The good news is that Jesus, leading us by the gift of the Spirit, will unmask evil for what it is, day by day, as we follow him in this wilderness.

That's why John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, logged temptation as a means of grace. Prayer, reading Scripture, confession, receiving communion, singing, gathering - these are means of grace. But Wesley also listed among them *temptation*.

Why? Because God's grace, truly unmasked, is more warped than our temptations. And it's in our honest confrontation of the storms inside and out, that God unmask us, refines us, and makes us better than we are. God, bringing us face to face with the Tempter as a means of loving who God's creating us to be.