

Imagine yourself in the situation Jesus found himself facing the devil. What would you have done? I'll be honest with you: I probably would have agreed. Just think about it, being able to do whatever you want, end world hunger, greed, hatred, bring peace to the nations, do whatever it takes to improve everyone's life, to name just some possibilities.

If someone approached me offering all this and more, I can see myself considering it, thinking of all the good deeds I could do and that maybe, just maybe, I might actually do a good job. But what if I don't? I think it's fair to assume that any of us would start out with the best intentions. But eventually most of us would slowly descend. Call it curiosity, selfishness, laziness, greed, boredom... Turning rocks into bread soon wouldn't be enough anymore.

'It won't hurt anyone if I made myself a little taller, a little more handsome or smarter, right? And while we're at it, let's quickly adjust that bank account and let my hair grow back. World peace can be achieved tomorrow, no need to hurry. Before we'd notice we'd have turned into medieval alchemists, not turning rocks into bread but gold.

Being trusted with such powers is without a doubt tempting. Which is exactly what the devil was going for, as the story clearly implies. So why did Jesus not accept his offers? He probably saw through the temptation right from the start, given that he immediately started resisting. He could have tricked the devil. He could have done what the devil wanted him to do, take his powers and then still do what he thought was right, ignoring their deal. The almighty son of God should be able to do that.

So again, why didn't he? I don't think he was scared. There were angels watching over him the entire time, so there wasn't really any reason to be scared. I also don't think that he was being stupid or naive about it. Admittedly, he was a bit uncreative simply citing 'What is written' but I guess getting into an actual argument with the devil simply would have been too tedious for him to put up with after 40 days of fasting.

No I think he had a very clear idea in mind when he decided not to embrace the temptation of the devil.

Four or five years ago, Robin Hut, a British Methodist minister, Christine's former mentor, now friend and my grandfather by choice, visited Peace Church and did a workshop on how to approach the stories of and around the Bible. One of the stories he chose was the one we just heard. And one sentence stuck to me until today. To the question why Jesus didn't turn stones into bread and end world hunger once and for all, Rob's answer was: 'Because nobody else would do it.'

And that is perfectly true! Sure it would be nice to have someone to simply solve all our problems with a snap of his fingers. But would that really make us happy? For a short period yes, but not on the long run I think. From childhood on, step by step, we are learning to take care of ourselves and, ideally, others. We watch, we listen, we learn by following the examples of people that inspire us, that we, for quite some time literally speaking, look up to.

What's very important though is the feeling, that we can in fact reach that goal. Trying to achieve the impossible most of the time is simply frustrating and not very healthy. We end up disillusioned and reluctant, with a feeling of helplessness. We need realistic goals to feel confident. And by realistic I don't mean easy. I mean realistic. Turning stone into bread is not realistic though.

Had Jesus decided to do it, his people surely would have worshipped him, applauded him for his generosity. But to put it in the words of Clark Kent, whom you might better know as Superman:

,It's easy to be brave if you're bulletproof.' What a convenient excuse that would be for us. 'Sure, I'd love to help, but what do you expect me to do? Catch a bullet? Turn rocks into bread?' We would just lean back, let the gifted do the hard work and probably even complain if they didn't serve us gluten free products.

I don't know about you but I can't fly like Superman. If I saw him flying by I surely would think that that's a pretty neat ability to have, but I could never picture myself doing it, no matter how hard I tried. So why should I?

And another thing: would we really be proud of it even if we could do all these things? I still think it would be amazing to be able to do whatever I can imagine, but don't you feel good about where you are right now because of where you came from? At least half the fun about homemade food is the making. Every skill needs to be learned and trained and that's something to be proud of.

We need that sense of achievement, otherwise life would feel pretty hollow. It wouldn't hurt if life was a little easier and less scary, a bit more predictable, but at the same time we have all it takes to face the adversities that come with all the good things.

Jesus knew that. He knew that doing what nobody else could do wouldn't inspire anyone. It would make humanity dependent, and should for whatever reason, Jesus not be around anymore, vulnerable. He decided to adjust his actions to his human appearance to give us the impression that we could do the same.

There are miracles Jesus performed, that none of us will ever be able to. But being kind to each other, welcoming strangers as friends, sharing food and shelter doesn't require divine powers. Each and every one of us can do it, just as he did. He showed us what needs to be done to make the world a better place.

I have another movie quote in mind this time from the movie 'Bruce Almighty':

You fixed your life and you gave everyone what they wanted Bruce. But since when does anyone have a clue about what they want?

Parting the red sea is not a miracle. It's a magic trick. A single mom who's working two jobs and still finds time to take her kid to soccer practice, that's a miracle. A teenager who says "no" to drugs and "yes" to an education, that's a miracle. People want God to do everything for them. But what they don't realize is **they** have the power. You want to see a miracle? Be the miracle.

Let's finish with a prayer by our friend Rob:

Thank you, Jesus:
for not turning stones into bread,
for not jumping off the temple roof,
for not being the wonder boy.

Thank you, Jesus:
for not accepting the golden crown,
for not taking authority over earthly kingdoms.

Thank you, Jesus:
for choosing the way of service
rather than domination,
for choosing the long, slow road
rather than that of instant solutions,
for choosing loyalty to your Father's Kingdom
rather than personal acclaim and approval.

Thank you, Jesus:
for facing hot and cold,
good and evil,
life and death,
yes and no,
forty days and forty nights.

Thank you, Jesus:
for showing the evil the door
and make us free to face our wilderness decisions
with greater vision and courage.

Amen