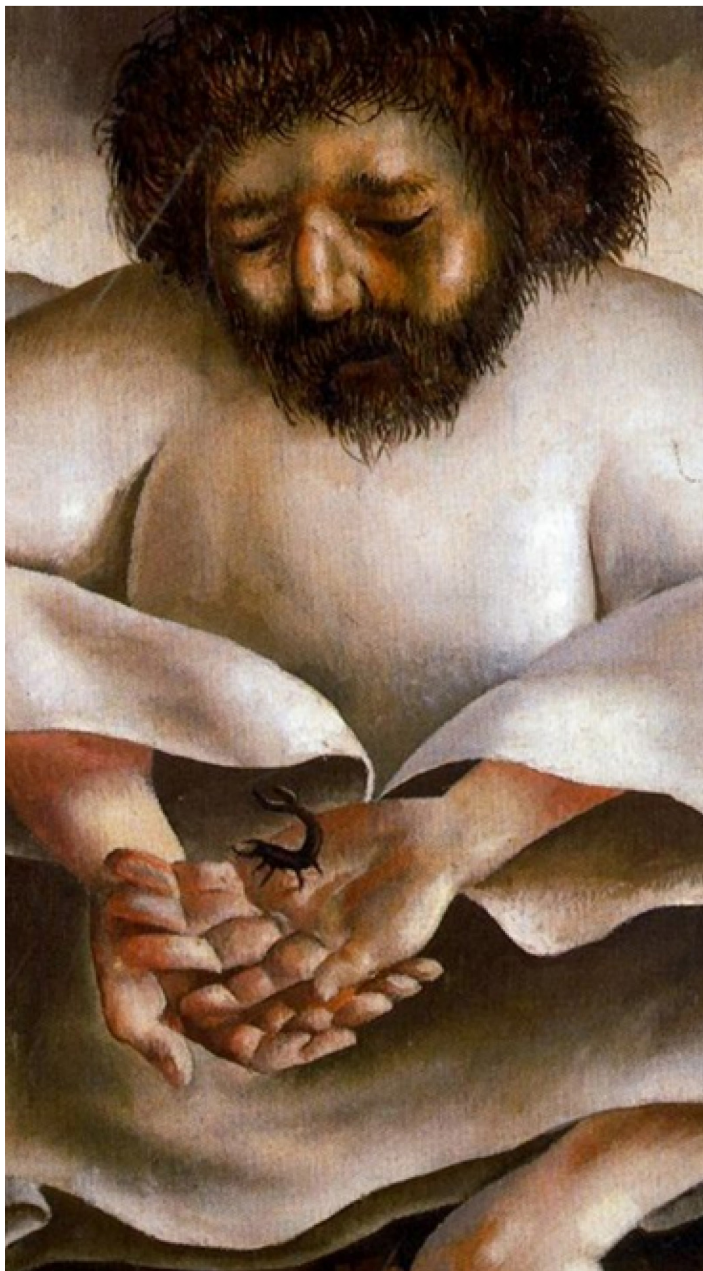


# 7. Test

In 1939, Stanley Spencer painted his 'Christ in the Wilderness' series. Exiled from his beloved Berkshire village, and living alone in a small London room, he strongly identified with Jesus' exile in the wilderness.



In this painting, a little scorpion sits on the palm of a sad-faced Jesus. He, in turn, sits on the desert's rocky floor, alone and vulnerable. In a sense, as Stephen Cottrell reflects in *Christ in the Wilderness*, what we are looking at here is a fourth temptation. Jesus has already been tested three times. He has turned his back on a Messiahship focussing on solving humanity's problems ("stones into bread": Mt 4.3-4) or spectacular stunts ("throw yourself down": Mt 4.5-7) or global power ("all the kingdoms of the world: Mt 4.8-10), and, in Spencer's imagination, is now tempted to turn his back also on Messiahship with a sting in its tail.

Can he do this? Is he ready to be a Messiah who must die? Will the hands open to the venom of the scorpion also open themselves to nails? We notice with a shudder that another scorpion scurries over the ungiving ground perilously close to his naked feet.... Is this what God is asking of his 'beloved Son'? Gethsemane's testing is brought into Jesus' wilderness, the sky dark and threatening behind him.

## Today...

...as we wonder, Lord Jesus, at your gentle embrace of death we pray for grace, this Lent, to journey with you to the cross.

**Amen**