

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Go to Jesus!

Who do you trust? For months, we've been watching political commercials and campaign debates. The one thing that every campaign wants to do is get you to trust their candidate. So they talk about their man or woman's experience in government or outside of government. They show you pictures of their family and put their spouse and kids up on the stage with them. They spend millions of dollars trying to get you to think of their man or woman in a way that will make you trust him or her more than anybody else. The funny thing is, some of that might actually work. You might hear a candidate's speech and look at him or her in a different way. Some commercial might actually change your mind about the character or the experience of this or that potential president. That's what they're hoping for anyway. They want to tell you something that will make you turn to their candidate this election year. At the risk of being struck by lightning for comparing Jesus to American presidential candidates, this morning, the book of Hebrews calls on us to hold firmly to Christ. To get us to do that, it reminds us of Jesus' experience and his character. It urges us to turn to him in all our times of need. My friends, **go to Jesus**

I.

American politicians always want us to think they're regular people, so they show us pictures of their kids. They go to barbeques and local restaurants and town hall meetings. You can decide for yourselves if you think that works. But this morning, the Holy Spirit reminds us that Jesus is really one of us, and that's one reason to turn to him. **Go to Jesus. He knows what your life is like.**

Our text says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”** Now, obviously, Jesus didn't live in 21st century America. He didn't have to wrestle with house payments and debate about who's going to pick up the kids and try to figure out how to put his kids through college or how to live on an ever shrinking pension. But even so, Jesus does know what life is like in this sinful world because Jesus was one of us. He was a real human being who came down here and dealt with real life. Jesus had real flesh and blood. He had a real human heart and soul and mind. So he grew and developed – the Bible even says that he grew in wisdom, so his human nature learned, even while his divine nature knew everything. Since his father was a carpenter, we can imagine Joseph teaching him to use tools and like any other child, he had to develop the manual dexterity to make those tools work properly. He might even have hit his fingers with a hammer once or twice, who knows? But he experienced our lives. He hurt and he really felt it. He changed physically and mentally and emotionally, just like every child does as he or she grows up.

So he faced temptation in every way just like we do. Temptation is one of the hardest parts of our life. Think how often we do or say the wrong thing. Sometimes, we're just being mean or egotistical or thoughtless. But sometimes, we're actually trying to do what's right, but the words come out wrong and we make a situation worse. Sometimes we don't even know the harm we're causing. But every situation in which we could sin is temptation. We wrestle with it when it faces us. We wrestle with it when we realize after the fact that we could have done so much better but our sinful weakness got in the way. We feel guilty and angry and depressed when we fail. And so we dread the next round of temptation.

Jesus faced temptation just like we do. He was the oldest son of a large family in a small town. Think of all the temptations that come from other people having more money than we do. Jesus knew what it was like to be attacked and lied about. He knew what it was like to have his words twisted. Think of all the temptations that come from being treated unfairly and from being unpopular. Jesus faced the things we face.

But there was one great difference between him and us: he had no sin. So even though his human heart felt how much temptation hurts, he didn't have a sinful nature inside him clamoring to commit those sins. But that doesn't mean it was easy. It hurts to have the devil attack you. It hurts to have the world around us torment

us and the devil uses that to tempt us over and over again. Jesus experienced it all. He knew what it felt like to have an empty stomach. He knew what it felt like to have your arms ache from hours of physical labor. He knew what it was like to squint at hard to read characters on a page when there wasn't enough light. He knew what it was like to have brothers who didn't support what he was doing and he probably knew what it felt like to have his father die when he was still in his teens or twenties. Jesus knew how much life here hurts.

Because he did, he can sympathize with our weaknesses. He's felt them. Because he is the Son of God, he knows everything. So he knows what is hard in your life, what temptations torture you, what failures in your marriage and in your job and in your family you wish you could undo. And because he is a real human being, he understands where we are and what we long for on a heart to heart level. So we can go to him. Our text says, **"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."** Jesus will hear us. Jesus will understand why we are praying. Jesus will answer our prayers in the way that is best for us. He will show us mercy – compassion – when life hurts. He will show us grace – love that we don't deserve, love that bails us out of all the problems and all the troubles we create for ourselves with our sins. When he doesn't bail us out, it's because he knows when we need to struggle. Because he is one of us and he did live our lives, he knows when consequences will teach us to beat our sinful nature down and when they will bring us to him for forgiveness. He knows and he loves us and he hears all our prayers. My friends, go to Jesus.

II.

But Jesus is more than just our comforter in chief. He is our great high priest who has gone through the heavens for us. He bails us out of our sin and has compassion on us especially when we make our own lives hurt, because he took our place here. God calls us to hang on to the faith that we confess because that faith is totally and completely in Christ. My friends, **go to Jesus. He was perfect in our place.**

Don't you wish you could be perfect, just for a day? How about just for a few minutes? We can't be. But Jesus was. This morning in our gospel lesson, we heard the familiar story of Jesus being tempted by the devil. I think we can lose the point of that lesson if we bog down too much in the details. I mean, I've never had the devil offer me all the kingdoms of this world if I would just worship him. He doesn't need to promise me anything because he gets me to worship him – he gets me to sin – all the time. Likewise, I've never gone forty days without eating and I've never had the power to turn stones into bread. While I have stood on some pretty high towers, it never occurred to me to jump and trust the angels to catch me. While there is a real application to every one of us in every one of those temptations, the real reason that God recorded this confrontation between Jesus and the devil is to show us Jesus winning. He had beaten every temptation of the devil for thirty years before this and he beat every one after this for the rest of his life. So while Jesus was growing up and developing and learning in Nazareth, he never sinned. He never swore when he hit his finger with a hammer. He never lusted after a pretty girl. He never hated the rich kids in town with all their money and snotty attitudes. He never made someone else feel bad just to make himself feel good.

He did all that in our place. You and I are guilty – if not of those sins, of plenty others, far more than we can count. If you're anything like me, you can't help but stop and think sometimes of the terrible things you said to your parents, or the ways that you hurt your spouse or your coworkers or brothers and sisters in church. Sometimes when you least expect it, a memory of your own selfishness and ego will force itself into your mind. But the truth is, we give in to temptation so many times that we don't even remember them all. I've had the experience of someone reminding me of something I did or said, and I honestly don't remember doing it. But I probably did. Temptation bags us every single day. So Jesus came down here and was perfect in our place. He covered all the sin in our actions, in our words, in our hearts and in our minds with his perfect life. So when we see him beating the devil, we see him beating our own sin.

That's why our reading calls him our great high priest. I'm not sure we always get that high priest image because we don't really have priests, not in the sense that the Old Testament church did. If you think of preachers like me when you think of priests, you're not completely on the mark. Certainly, priests did teach and perhaps even preach. But their primary job was to serve as go-betweens. They went between the people and God. God built his temple so that he was hidden in an inner room where no one was allowed to go. It was called the Most Holy Place. Once a year the high priest could offer a sacrifice and go into that Most Holy Place and stand in the presence of God and make atonement for the sins of the people.

All that was a picture of what Jesus was going to do. When he died, he entered heaven itself and he laid his sacrifice before his Father there for all of us. And because Jesus was not just a true man, but also the true Son of God, his sacrifice was enough to pay for us all. So God the Father accepted it. His blood, his hell, his death paid for all those sins that torment us and even for all the ones we can't remember. His blood washed away all the guilt and all the punishment we have coming. We are free from it all.

If Jesus did that much for you and me, he's not going to abandon us now. When we are weak, when we struggle with sin and temptation, Jesus wants us to come to his throne of grace and get mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. What is your weakness? What is the sin that you wish you could conquer in this life? What is the hurt that you inflict on the people you love and that in turn inflicts pain on your life? The truth is, some of the people we hurt may never forgive us. But our relationship God is already healed. Jesus fixed that for us. God has forgiven us totally and completely. His grace is the only way that we can fix those broken relationships here. And Jesus wants us to have the strength to turn from our sins. He wants us to know when we struggle and get frustrated and even feel like we're failing, he will keep coming and picking us up and forgiving us and recharging our spiritual batteries. Then he will send us out to strive to live for him again. In your time of need, go to Jesus with confidence. He will be with you in every temptation of this life.

My friends, who is easier to talk to, someone who knows what you're going through or someone who's never experienced anything like that? Isn't it someone who knows? I sometimes think that some people won't come and talk to me because they think pastors don't sin or face real temptation. Maybe I don't face the same ones you do. But I wrestle with temptation every single day. I know you do, too. Whether you are ever comfortable talking to me about it, Jesus felt it all. He experienced all the temptations of life. And he knows you and what you are wrestling with today. Trust him and go to him in prayer and come and hear his word and be lifted up by his love. Amen.