

March 6, 2022 – The First Sunday in Lent – Hebrews 4:14-16

Crushed . . . yet Confident

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, 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 empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

In the name of our Savior Jesus, dear fellow believers!

This letter to the Hebrew Christians, to which we turn our attention this morning, is filled with comforting, confidence-building doctrinal truth. During the middle of the first century as the Christian Church was growing and spreading, Christians faced increasing persecution. That persecution came first from the Roman government which had declared Christian to be an “illegal religion.” Perhaps more severe persecution, especially emotional, came from family and friends who continued to adhere to Old Testament ritual and regulation. They were still looking for the promised Messiah, having rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. They were urging their Christian relatives to give up on Jesus and return to the Mosaic law. These Jewish Christians were being shunned and condemned by those with whom they had been the closest family and friends.

So the unnamed author of this letter to the scattered Jewish Christians encourages his 1st Century readers as well as us who live in the 21st Century. He wants them and us to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Mosaic regulations for worship life. All the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices didn’t rescue anyone from sin. They only pointed ahead to the perfect sacrifice presented by ***“the great high priest, . . . Jesus the Son of God.”*** Jesus is better than Moses and Aaron and all the Old Testament high priests. So we learn about Jesus, our high priest. The Lenten Season emphasizes the suffering Jesus endured so that our sin and guilt are paid for. We see his burden in the Garden of Gethsemane. Listen to St. Matthew’s account of Jesus in the garden.

³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹ “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” (Matthew 26:37-42)

Do you feel Jesus’ burden? It’s the burden of sin and guilt that overwhelmed Jesus. But he is the perfect Son of God, so it wasn’t his sin and guilt, it’s ours. We see Jesus **CRUSHED . . . YET CONFIDENT.**

Jesus was crushed by that burden of guilt and sin. How do you feel when you realize your sin? The unkind words our have spoken? The dissatisfaction in your heart with your lot in life? Your jealousy of someone else's house, or car, or clothes, or friends? Take all of those times your guilt has weighed you down and put them on a pile. That is what was crushing Jesus in the garden. Now add to Jesus the guilt and sin of all people who have ever lived or will live on this earth. Overwhelmed? Surely! Crushed? Indeed!

And yet, despite that burden that was crushing him, Jesus was confident. He prayed to his heavenly Father, asking for relief from his burden, but showed his willingness to endure with the words: **"Yet not as I will, but as you will and may your will be done."** He was confident because he knew why had had come to earth. He had become a human being and lived that life of perfection because he knew that this was the Father's plan for rescuing the human race from sin and guilt. His confidence came from the words of the Father which he had heard at the time of his baptism: **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** (Matthew 4:17) Not long before he went to Jerusalem, knowing that his betrayal and death were close at hand, he heard the heavenly Father repeat those word on the Mount of Transfiguration. He was confident because he was doing the heavenly Father's will. The gospel lesson today took us to the wilderness after his baptism where Jesus was tempted by Satan for forty days. Jesus **"has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."**

Jesus' confidence, despite being crushed, shines out in his high priestly prayer in the upper room on Maundy Thursday evening. He prayed: **"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."** Jesus knew that by carrying the crushing burden of our sins he was glorifying his heavenly Father. He knew that when this work of redemption was complete that he would be restored to the glory he had given up to come to earth to rescue us. Not only that he ws so confident that he knew those who believe in him will also have an eternal future in his glorious presence. He prayed: **"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."**

This why the letter writer can say: **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.** He shows us Jesus – **Crushed . . . but Confident.**

The writer emphasizes for his 1st Century contemporaries and for all believers since, that because of Jesus even when we feel the crushing weight of sin and face the burdens of life in this sinful world we too can be confident.

He says: **Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."** We can pray and live in confidence because of what our great high Priest, Jesus, has accomplished for us. What a blessing he gives us, for we know how weak we are and how quickly we often fall to the devil's temptations.

It's been said that the only time losing is more fun than winning is when you're fighting temptation. And it's been said that those who flee temptation generally leave a forwarding address. A man who was more than a few pounds overweight decided it was time to take his diet seriously. He even changed his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. But one morning he showed up to work with half a box of donuts and crumbs all over his shirt. "It's okay," he told his co-workers, "God wants me to have them. You see, I prayed to him and said, "God, if you want me to have some delicious donuts, give me a sign: let there be an empty parking spot right up front. And, sure enough, there it was . . . and only the eighth time I circled the block!"

Isn't that how we all are though? We pray, "God help me resist temptation," but keep circling the block? We ask God, "Help me be more faithful in my worship attendance," but stay up late Saturday night. We pray, "God help me with this sin I'm struggling with," but we keep toeing the line to see how close we can get without falling over.

We're like the little boy whose father clearly told him, "Come right home after school today. Do not go swimming in the creek. Come straight home." But sure enough when he finally goes home dripping wet, his father asked him, "Didn't I tell you not to go swimming? Why did you?" "Well, sir. I had my swim suit along and just couldn't resist the temptation." "Why did you take your swim suit to school?" And the little boy replied, "I wanted to be prepared, just in case I was tempted."

So, what can we do about it? Nothing. But there is one who can. Our great high priest.

Do you know the duties of a high priest? They had several. They were to pray to God on the people's behalf. They were to instruct the people on God's behalf. In this way they would serve as mediators. But their role of go-between between the people and God involved more than just communication. It involved a lot of sacrifice. The priests would slaughter countless animals each day to show that sin must be paid for with a life. But the 1st Century Jewish Christians didn't need that old priesthood they were tempted to turn back to anymore. That priesthood was only meant to point ahead to Jesus--the great high priest.

How did Jesus serve? He too prayed to God and he taught the people. But that wasn't his primary role. Jesus came to make a sacrifice. And it had to be a perfect sacrifice. If Jesus had sinned--even once!--then his sacrifice on the cross could not have paid for our sin. But he didn't sin--not even once!

In the same way, we will fall into temptation and sin when we don't hang on to God's Word. "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." Know the truth of God's Word. Read it. Study it. Learn it. Come to worship. Come to Bible Class. Celebrate the sacraments. Remember your baptism. Take the Lord's Supper as often as you can. Grow in your faith. Strengthen your grip on the truths of God's grace. Follow the example of Jesus. Remember how he responded to the devil's temptations. The Gospel lesson this morning shows us three of the temptations with which Satan came at Jesus. Each time Jesus responds with a Scripture quotation. He had studied the Scripture. He had memorized it. Now it was his best weapon in responding to Satan. Follow your Savior's example. Face temptation confidently with Scripture as your sword to drive Satan away.

Now, on our own, none of us has the spiritual strength to cling to the cross and keep from letting go. But thankfully, we're not on our own. We can call for help at any time from our great high priest. ***"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."***

Someone once said that when temptation comes knocking on the door, call Jesus. "Would you please get that for me?" And when Temptation sees who answers, he'll say, "Oh! I'm sorry. I must have the wrong address." And he'll turn around and run. Really that's what we do every time we pray the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." We approach the throne of grace and cry out, "Jesus, would you please get that for me?" Resist temptation in thanks to your great high priest for the sacrifice he's made for you.

Not everyone has access to the President of the United States. But you don't need it. You can call in greater forces when temptation comes knocking at your door. With your sins removed by the sacrifice of your great high priest, you have direct access to God. You can confidently approach his throne--a throne, not of wrath, but of grace, as he longs to bless you. There you will find grace to help in time of need.

Resist temptation with help from your great high priest as you cling to the faith.

A wealthy woman was interviewing potential chauffeurs to drive her Rolls Royce and narrowed it down to three candidates. She took the first to her driveway and asked, "How close could you get my Rolls to that brick wall without scratching it?" "I can get it within one foot. No problem!" he said. She asked the second applicant the same question. "I can get within 6 inches! No scratches guaranteed," he proudly said. But when she asked the third applicant, he replied, "Ma'am, I don't know how close I could get, but if I were driving your Rolls Royce, I'd leave a few feet of clearance to be sure not to damage your car."

Likewise, as we live in thanks to our Savior for rescuing us from the sin that's resulted in us giving to temptation time and time again, we keep our distance from those things that might "scratch" us again. Don't keep driving around the block looking for the empty space. And don't take your swimming suit along, just in case you're tempted. Live for him. Serve him in thanks. And with his help, crying out to the throne of grace, clinging confidently to the faith you profess, you can--you will--resist.

Satan wants to crush us with guilt and sin but just as our Savior was confident while being crushed so we too can face life with confidence.

Pastor Joel Jaeger