

October 17, 2021

Hebrews 4:14-16

“Jesus Felt Your Pain and Can Help!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Corina is an American singer and actress. She charted a string of dance hits in the United States between 1989 and 1997. Her biggest hit was a song called "Temptation." Perhaps you recall it. The chorus of the song goes like this: "Temptation is a part of life. It doesn't matter if its wrong or right. Temptation is a part of life. It doesn't matter if its wrong or right. It makes you do what you love."

Hopefully you don't need me to tell you that there are a lot of problems with that chorus. Incidentally, she sings it five times during the song. Is she trying to convince herself and us or is she just emphasizing the way in which most view every day temptations? No doubt the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places don't mind that chorus being etched into our squishy minds.

The truth is that while temptation is a part of life it matters if it's wrong or right. And loving what you do doesn't make what you are doing okay. Solomon writes in our Old Testament lesson, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity." Vanity is inflated self-love. And what should we make of the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24? Jesus states: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and possessions." The book of Revelation (22:15) says that outside of the city of heaven are those who love and practice falsehood.

Indeed, loving what you do doesn't make what you are doing okay. Wrong and right do matter. While temptation is now a sad part of life, it has eternal consequences as we see from the garden of Eden. But who really wants to hear such truths when you really want to do what you want to do?

The Christian is supposed to be fighting and overcoming temptations. The Christian is supposed to be filled with the love of Jesus in the forgiveness of sins rather than with an inflated self-love. The problem is that Corina's chorus is the dead heart of our sinful flesh. We are constantly at war with the love of Jesus. There is a part of us that would like to believe that Jesus died and forgave our sins so that we can embrace temptation and sin all the more, and even go to heaven too. But the apostle John sets us straight in his first epistle (3:4-10):

You know that he [Jesus our Savior] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin ... Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

That's bad news to our sinful flesh. We have been born of God. Sins have been washed away in our Baptism because of the self sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Are we like a female pig that returns to the filth after having been washed (2 Peter 2:22)? May God forbid that this be said of us! So, what will we do in the face of temptations? After all, temptation is a part of life down here. Every day is like being in the garden and the stakes are high. Dust we are but Jesus has died so that we might live! So again, what

will we do in the face of temptations? With that we are brought to our epistle lesson for this morning. These are words we desperately need to hear, believe, and hold onto:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

There are two things in this text on which we really need to focus. First, we have a great high priest. Second, he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Put those two realities together and you have the theme of our message: **Jesus Felt Your Pain and Can Help!** Let's break it down even further.

When the writer to the Hebrews says that "we have a great high priest ... let us hold fast our confession," we are to consider that Jesus has sacrificed himself for all of our sins that would damn us to an eternity of death in hell. Our confession is that in Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins and the most wonderful anticipation of living with him in perfect love forever. Jesus of Nazareth has saved us from our inflated self-love that would separate us from everything that is truly good and without end. In the hour of our earthly death and in the day when people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground before the terror of the Lord we will stand washed in the blood of the Lamb and be perfectly safe.

Jesus, our great high priest who offered himself and shed his blood for forgiveness, is who we are to hold onto. Jesus we confess. But temptations would lure and entice us away from him so that we no longer remain covered in his washing blood. Temptations would cover us in inflated self-love and filth, leaving us to be terrorized in death and utterly panicked in the day of reckoning when what is hidden in the dark is made plain to see in the light of Jesus' coming. At this point the writer to the Hebrews comforts us with the most lovely invitation to "draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." How is it that he speaks such tender words? Our sermon hymn states in the second verse: "Since we have a priest who suffered, knowing weakness, tears, and pain, who, like us, was tried and tempted, unlike us, without a stain - since he shared our lowly place, let us boldly seek his grace!" **Jesus Felt Your Pain and Can Help!**

The sinless Son of God went through everything that you have gone through. I want you to really think about that for a moment. When I say that Jesus has felt your pain I am saying to you that in his life and sacrifice on the cross he absorbed your particular miserable life into himself so that you might find rest in him. While this may not make temptations easy to deal with, we take comfort in knowing that they have already been dealt with in Jesus. Faith in Christ, who forgives all sins and who teaches us to fix our eyes on things to come rather than on things down here, is what will extinguish the fires of temptation. Prayer that asks for help and considers the love of God in Christ, which is forgiveness and hope, is the only thing that will push back the temptations. This is why Jesus said to his disciples in their temptations on the night before his crucifixion: "... watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)." Have faith and beg for help.

Jesus Felt Your Pain and Can Help! When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, in the garden of Gethsemane, and was suffering on the cross, he experienced everything that you have already gone through and will go through. All that Jesus went through was to rescue us and bring us to what is true and forever. It is good to consider this to encourage us. Jesus understands.

Take for example Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The evil that you so desperately desire to do was no greater of an urge than Jesus being hungry after not eating for forty days and forty nights. He did not turn stones to bread. The horrible situation you feel when you want to believe that God will understand if you do it anyway was the temptation that Jesus endured when the devil placed him on the highest point of the temple to look down on a long drop that would have killed him. Jesus didn't buy into the idea that his way could be evil and that God would send angels to save. And when the devil showed Jesus the delights of every kingdom and promised him that he could have it all without the labor of the cross, Jesus looked only to his Father for what was truly good and told the devil to leave.

When we see how Jesus loved us and continues to love us we end up like Joseph who was tempted to have carnal relations with Potiphar's wife. He said to the one who would seduce him, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And there you have it! Like Joseph we say: "How can I do this to my Jesus who has loved me so much and only desires to give me everything that is true forever? How can I do this to the one who has felt all my pain to rescue me from it? How can I do this to the one who loves me and has promised to help in my everyday troubles, in my hour of death, and in the day when people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground before the terror of the Lord? Because Jesus has felt my pain and helps me I will not do it!"

The author of our sermon hymn writes: "Sacrifice and suffering over, now he sits at God's right hand crowned with praise, no more an outcast, his pre-eminence long-planned; such a great high priest we have, strong to help, supreme to save!" **Jesus Felt Your Pain and Can Help!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott