

Pentecost 20B (22B Hb 4:9-16)

October 7, 2018

Hymns: 104 - 116 - 121 - 53 v4-6

*Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus - our Lord and great high priest before His Father and ours.
Amen!*

2ND in 3 part series: *Tempted in Every Way*

HEBREWS 4:12-16

TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY – AS WE ARE!

Dear fellow Christians – sorely tempted by Satan, the world, and your own human flesh,

A group of college students were having a discussion about the nature of God. Some of the students did not believe in God . . . but most had a belief of some kind. The discussion was lively. One young woman said, ***“God is like a great big Teddy Bear Who gives me a hug when I need it.”*** To this, a young man replied, ***“No Teddy Bear God for me! God is the Chief Justice of some kind of universal Supreme Court, Who’s going to nail me to the wall when I show up for judgment!”*** The discussion raged on for some time and finally someone offered up this idea, ***“God is whatever we think God is. One person’s idea is as good as another person’s idea. We shouldn’t be judging other people’s religious ideas.”***

This opinion seemed to gain traction with the group. But then someone asked a question. ***“What about Son of Sam’s idea of God? Or Islam’s Mohammed? They say their gods told them to kill people. Is their idea of God okay?”*** The group decided to modify their opinion just a bit. ***“People can have any idea they want of God as long as they don’t hurt other people,”*** they decided. That really sounded like the most

reasonable way to many of the students. Nobody gets hurt and everybody gets their own god

These young people were genuinely searching for a way to understand God. I would hope that we would be more than uncomfortable with the idea that God is whatever people THINK that God is. We believe that God has revealed Himself through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ. God is neither a Teddy Bear nor is God a Supreme Court justice, Who is going to nail us when we show up for judgment.

The writer of Hebrews spells out our understanding of God and God's relationship to us in our text for today. He writes: ***“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. 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. 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.”***

Notice how we are to come to God's throne--we are to approach God with **confidence**. **What is the first thing we learn about God from this passage? We learn that God is approachable through His Christ.** This is important. In Old Testament times with His chosen people, God emphasized the need for an intercessory force to make open the way to God. The “throne of grace” of which the writer of Hebrews speaks in the New Testament stands in stark contrast to the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant.

In 1 Chronicles 13 we read about the time when David and his soldiers moved the ark from Abinadab's house. When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, one of the soldiers named Uzzah reached out his hand to

steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled, and he was struck dead simply and solely because he had put his hand on the Ark (8-10). The Ark of the Covenant was so holy that only the high priest was to approach it, and he was to do so with fear and trembling, for any transgression against the Ark would have fatal consequences for him too. The Ark was representative of God's presence. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies part of the temple that came to house the Ark – and only once a year at that! The idea God was conveying was that He was unapproachable by sinful human beings – unless and until the Christ should come, Who would do away with sin, once for all!

But this is not so with the **throne of grace**. OUR high priest, Jesus Christ, has already interceded in our behalf. And because He has, we can approach the throne of grace confidently and boldly. He has made us sons and daughters of the Most High. You don't approach your parents with fear and trembling, do you? Our young people - you don't come crawling on your hands and knees with your face buried in the carpet and say, "*O exalted and majestic father, please do me the honor of granting your humble servant, worm of the dust that I am, the high honor of borrowing the car tonight.*" You don't approach your father like that, do you? Well, some of us may.

Some of us may have grown up with parents who were quite harsh in their methods of discipline. For most of us, the image of "father" is one of kindness and accessibility. Not for all, unfortunately, but for most. And that is the image that the writer of Hebrews wants us to have of God. Jesus called God, Abba, - an affectionate form of "father" - "Daddy." That is the first reason the writer of Hebrews writes, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence . . ." Jesus showed us that God's nature is love and that God is approachable.

But why should we come to the throne of grace in the first place? The

writer tells us why: ***“so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** That is why we come. Life is hard. Sometimes it is cruel. Our greatest need for grace and mercy is because of our sins. Where do we turn at times like that? Should we turn away from God, run and hide, as did Adam and Eve in the garden? No! In Christ, we are dearly invited to run TO God! We approach a throne of ***grace!*** **We have a God Who is merciful; God understands our situation and cares. For in Christ, we have One Who was tempted in every way as we are!**

From the beginning to the end of His earthly stay Jesus faced temptations more severe than we shall ever know. He felt the full pressure and pull as all the troops in hell’s barracks with all the weapons from hell’s arsenals stormed against Him. He felt those temptations even more than we do because while we so often fall under temptation’s first round, He remained standing to receive every assault. The point is that Jesus knows! Though very real and repeated temptation left His sinlessness unshaken, He knows what it is all about. From experience He knows what we face, and His heart can well sympathize with us. What a comfort it is for us to know that Jesus is one of us – as well as being God!

But there is one thing more to remember: We have access to that throne of grace only because of what Christ did for us on the cross. We do not receive God’s grace because of any merit on our part. We receive that grace because of what Christ did in our behalf. We approach that throne confidently only because Christ, Who knows all of our temptations – without sin! - gave Himself for us to cleanse us and make us like Himself - holy and acceptable at the throne of His Father, so that we might come confidently!

Have you ever thought to yourself, *“Ah, if I could only be 18 again and know what I know now! If only I could live my life over, I would do a much*

better job the second time around.” Unfortunately, that is one luxury that is never given to any of us. Time marches relentlessly onward. Pontius Pilate spoke for all of us when he said, “What I have written, I have written.” We can’t go back. We cannot undo the past. We can, however, do something about the future. Some of us are perhaps carrying a great deal of excess baggage with us from the past. If we could just forget the past--with its heartaches, disappointments, errors, and sins--if we could just somehow lay that burden down, the future would hold much more promise for us. Christ offers us that opportunity.

*Whenever God looks at us, He looks at us through the cross of His Son, Jesus. His victory over our sin, His victory over our chaos is what God sees.” That’s how God looks at us—through the prism of Christ’s cross. And because of that cross God sees us as if we were without blemish. **Jesus – the man** tempted in every way as we are, but without sin...**Jesus, God** and worthy sacrifice for our sins....is our great High Priest! What a great go-between us and God’s throne of both judgment and mercy!: **“Therefore, since we have a great high priest . . . Jesus the Son of God . . . 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.”** AMEN!*

To Him Who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority now and forever. Amen.