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. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

**Your Help You Need**

You need help. Seriously, you do. I do too. You can’t do this on your own. Neither can I. Someone needs to go in your place and mine. God has been teaching his people this since his first promise in the Garden of Eden after the fall into sin. The seed of the woman would crush the old evil foe; one person for all people.

You see that as the one man dressed in white goes up the temple steps and passes through the heavy curtain in the temple. He’s the high priest. One day every year this one man enters into God’s presence on behalf of the nation of Israel with the blood of a sacrificed animal to pay for his sins and the sins of the people. One for all the people.

You see that as the giant curses God and God’s people. Almost as tall as basketball hoop and built like a brick house Goliath screams his challenge and laughs at their inability to face him. Then you see him. Without armor to protect him and only a sling as a weapon one man stands alone to fight as one of the people for the people.

You see that there in the wilderness with nothing but the beasts and animals to keep him company. He faces a different giant. This one’s deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. Thus far his record is undefeated; since Adam he’s beaten them all. And now here’s a guy hungry, alone—looks like easy picking for one with thousands of years of successful battle experience. One guy with flesh and blood for all people.

The writer to the Hebrews describes him this way: “**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. 15For 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”** (Hebrews 4:14-15).

There he is, your help. He is our great high priest; superior in every way to those many priests who had gone before him. He is your representative before God—one man for all the people. He fights as one of us for all of us. You might see this “great” and “high priest” and Jesus and Son of God, we read how he is without sin, we know that he is for us, but is he really? If he so much greater and superior, if he has already gone through the heavens, how can he be for me? Sometimes it feels that way when life’s struggles grow larger and the answers to life’s questions and future seem fewer. As the daily grind doesn’t change and the fight to keep going feels like a lost cause, does he notice me? Or maybe I shouldn’t be too much of a bother for him. Just work harder. Do more. Pull yourself up. He has plenty of greater problems to solve. You can take care of it yourself.

And still, there he is facing the devil. He looks like you and me with meat on his bones and a heart that pumps blood through his veins. There he is wrestling the same temptations that we know too well.

True, none of us have gone 40 days without food. But that’s not the heart of the temptation. It’s there in the question, “If you are the Son of God,” or, “Since you are the Son of God.” Since you are the Son of God, Jesus, you shouldn’t be suffering like this, should you?

You know this temptation. After all, you are God’s child. That’s what he named you in baptism: You are his son. You are his daughter. And the temptation, like with Jesus, is if you are a child of God, why do you suffer and struggle? If you are a child of God, then why aren’t you more financially comfortable? If you are a child of God, why must you suffer that pain and sickness? Since you are a child of God, life should be a little easier. Since you are a child of God, things should be better at home and with your family. Since you are a child of God, you should be able to enjoy life and have happiness like them. The devil wants you to believe that in order to live in this world you need this happiness, this experience, you need to have so much money, and you need to have this type of relationship. And when you don’t one might wonder, “What if God doesn’t provide like he promises? What if this time is different? Has God given me enough?” It’s not a long fall into that temptation to doubt God’s will, his timing, his care, his love.

Yes, I’ve never been taken to a high place and promised the treasures of the world if I bow down and worship the devil. But the devil does come whispering, “Here’s the shortcut that you can take and you can have that success, the happiness, what you feel you deserve. Go ahead, cheat a little bit on the test. It will save you the shame of failure and save you from having to face the fact that you didn’t spend enough time studying. Go ahead, it’s not really a lie; it’s just not the whole truth. He doesn’t need to know any way. Really, you are protecting him. You don’t want to disappoint him. Here’s a shortcut to pleasure, escape the monotony of life, live a little. Click on the image. Go to that site. Take another drink. It will be better in the end. Look over here; there’s the shortcut to popularity, success, getting ahead. Share that rumor. Cut that person down. Even if you ruin her reputation, it’s her own fault she did it. She deserves it and you will feel better. Financial problems? Money issues? Here’s the shortcut: cut back on your offering giving. Shave a little time at work. Give back to yourself a little bit. Cheat the system; Uncle Sam doesn’t need all that money like you do.” We could go on. He’s constantly whispering in our ears with a seemingly friendly promise that will only cost a little.

No, I’ve never been to the highest point of the temple of Jerusalem and been tempted with throwing myself off to have the Lord’s angels save me. But you’ve stood there before at the edge of that pet sin knowing full well the triggers that pull you even closer to temptation. After all, you are a child of God. God promises that you won’t be tempted more than you can bear. And if you fall, he has to forgive you again, right? Jesus loves me this I know! That’s what saves, right? I don’t need to know anymore. I only need to be in church and his Word every so often; I already know everything I need to, don’t I? I can pick and choose which parts of God’s Word I’m going to pay attention to and follow. I can cheat. I can lie. I can waste my time and others. I can do whatever I want because Jesus loves me and promises to forgive me. Oh, how tempting it is to use God’s promises to give ourselves license to sin.

Of course it’s not just that we know the temptation. You know the sweet relief in the moment when you stop resisting. Oh, how great it feels when you give in and let yourself have that moment! But eventually reality crashes in. Shame washes over you. Satan’s friendly promise is empty and always barbed with ruin and destruction. The devil laughs in your face, “I can’t believe you listened. Do you hear what you just said? Do you see what you just did? Did you really just think that?” It’s especially in those moments when you can feel so alone. It’s even worse when it’s the same sin that you’ve fallen into again and again. No one gets what I’m dealing with, right? No one really understands, do they?

And that might be true. But Jesus does. He knows even better than you do. Where we have succumbed and gave in, where we have collapsed under the weight and jumped in, Jesus endured it all. He never gives in so Jesus experiences those temptations to their fullest extent. He was tempted in every way, just like we are, yet he was without sin. Jesus gets it. Our great high priest sympathizes with you. He doesn’t look down and shake his head in frustration and disgust. He doesn’t patronize, pity, or talk down to you. He suffers with you. It wasn’t an easy walk in the park as he resists the devil’s attacks. After the devil leaves, angels attend and serve our exhausted Savior Jesus (Mark 1:12)!

And still he chooses to do it because this is why he is here: one man for the all. It’s not for his own benefit. He doesn’t go toe-to-toe to fight the devil to prove anything to himself. He’s there for you. He is David’s son, our Champion, who faces the giant of sin, death, and devil in our place. It’s not just that he felt the temptations; he defeated them for you. So we see him there, alone, as he carries his cross to Calvary. He’s the great High Priest who stands before God not with the blood of animals but his own innocent blood poured out for you. Our Great High Priest hangs on that cross between heaven and earth, between God’s wrath and you. For us who are crushed under the weight of sin, Jesus claims the weight as his own, becomes sin for us, and is crushed in our place. For us who collapse and give into temptation, he is pierced and punished so that we might have peace with God. For us who have feel so alone and abandoned, he is forsaken by God so that He will never leave or forsake you. While he hangs from that cross bleeding and dying it looks like Jesus loses. He bows his head and gives up his spirit. It looks like the fight has gone out of him. He’s given up. Humanity’s greatest champion is buried in a tomb; death has claimed another. But we already know the rest of the story…where, oh Death, is your victory? Where, oh Death, is your sting? Not here; the tomb is empty. Jesus lives. He descends into hell and proclaims his victory. He crushed Satan’s head and death is defeated. Jesus lives; the victory is won.

That same living flesh-and-blood Jesus has gone through the heavens, ascended on high, where he sits in all power, rule, and authority and continues to serve as your representative. Your great High Priest reminds the Father, “You cannot punish her as her sins deserve. You’ve already punished me. Have mercy. I love them; you do too. That’s why I lived, died, and rose again. He didn’t earn it; we both know that. But that’s grace, right?”

That same Jesus assures you, “I know you are having a hard time. I know those temptations are great. No one else might know about it or know how hard it is right now for you. I do. You aren’t on your own. You don’t have to worry about trying to ‘beat it.’ I already have for you. Hold on. I’ve got you.” And he does, in Word and Sacrament. He encourages you with his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper to strengthen your faith and forgive yours sins. You aren’t alone. You have help. And he comes to you.

Resist sin. Run away from the devil to God’s throne with the full confidence. He’s not ashamed of your failures and weaknesses; he brings you in. He doesn’t hold you at a distance or allow your shame and weakness to get in the way; he comes to you in Word and Sacrament. Until Christ returns or he brings us home, we will face temptations all day long so we look forward to that eternal rest and peace that awaits us with him. Until then, go to God’s throne in prayer and you will receive his mercy that he will not treat you as your sins deserve. Go to God’s throne, there you will find his grace that you cannot earn or deserve; it’s yours and God promises it is sufficient for you. You need help. And you have it according to his perfect will and timing. He with you, always, not leaving or forsaking, because Jesus is your help you need. Amen.