

A Sympathetic Savior

Vicar Lincoln Albrecht—February 21st, 2010—1st Sunday in Lent—Heb. 4.14-16

Jude 2—Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Amen.

The Shamwow. The Titan peeler. Infomercial classics.

I am an infomercial junkie. I love watching them—no matter what they are selling—because they are so sensational. Take a pill lose 30 pounds. Buy a house for no money down and flip it for a profit of tens of thousands of dollars. Spray our product on your stains and it will be cleaner than you even remember it. Use our hangers and triple your closet space. Throw down our towel and it will soak up anything, without any work.

I think what gets me is I just can't get enough of the 'before' and 'after' pictures. A distressed, overworked, underpaid person who is swimming in debt is seen throwing money around like rice at a wedding. An out-of-shape, overweight person is seen smiling standing, eclipsed by their "fat clothes". A spill of Coke, or spaghetti sauce is soaked up, cleaned up, and brushed up so the carpet looks brand new.

Through the years, I have grown more cynical to these pictures. It seems like they have more magicians than marketers on their staff—but have you ever wondered why? Why, no matter what a person is selling, do they feature 'before' and 'after' pictures? Because they work. They give us a glimpse into what a person looked like before they used a product and how much their lives have changed since. This allows us to project our problems, our struggles onto life before this product. Makes an appealing product—because it seems like these people knew what we are going through.

But it is hard to believe their claims. Because you don't think they accurately represent what life is really like. It's not that the 'before' picture is hard to believe—it's the 'after'.

Our text gives us a powerful "before" & "after" picture of the Son of God. But I hope you don't view you Savior like an infomercial. I hope you don't think of your Great High Priest as someone trying to get over on you with some slights of hand, or clever marketing words. We have a **Sympathetic Savior who personally knows our weaknesses**.

The 'before' is the Son of God in heaven. Easy to accept. We know that Jesus is the Son of God and belongs in heaven.

And then, the writer to the Hebrews, goes on to the 'after' picture. It's a hard picture to accept. In fact, without faith, it is impossible.

The Son of God passed through the heavens, left the good and perfect home he lived in to join us. To become our Savior.

This is hard to comprehend. Why God, perfectly sinless, completely powerful and all-knowing, would want to come down to earth to be our Savior. But, by faith, this works because the Son of God has power and respect.

But the 'after' picture doesn't stop there. We have a **Sympathetic Savior who personally knows our weaknesses**. In our Gospel he felt the pressure of temptation. But are these more than stories to you? The Son of God was tempted in every way, just as you and I are, and yet was without sin. This is where our cynical side scoffs at the 'after' picture.

We are experienced enough to know how temptation works. It has various forms but one inevitable result.

Our pride convinces us that we are better than those around us. Our eyes scope out the weaknesses of others to puff ourselves up. Our feet quickly run to others to share our news. Our fingers quickly dial our gossipy friend, or tap out a text message or an email. Our lips share these weaknesses with others so they can see our superiority.

Or worldly pressure causes us to fall. Perhaps it is the latest book, TV show, or movie that the world and its critics acclaim as "gripping" or a "must see". So we hesitantly digest the product and look to see what all the fuss is about. But the glamorization of sin made this book, movie, or show so appealing. Lusty scenes tantalize, vile language drips from the mouths of the lead characters, greed and pride permeate every scene, and bawdy and vile humor is injected just to keep things light. The world clamors for more, acclaims the brilliant forward-thinking writers & directors, as your conscience condemns. The same old sin the world always knew, just recycled, repackaged.

We comfort ourselves that we don't approve of the sex scenes, the four-letter bombs, or the sin-fueled plot, but that we are adult-enough, discerning-enough to know right from wrong. It isn't until our children repeat things they saw us watching, or when we realize that our minds are stained by the language, by the scenes, by the mentality of the show that we become worried. Then we realize just how far into temptation we have fallen.

At other times it's the Devil, who speaks so logically, when no one else is around. Telling us no one will notice, no one will even care if we add a few extra moments to our break, or if we take a more than we rightfully deserve. "Everyone else is doing the same", "hard work isn't rewarded", warning "if you don't take care of yourself no one will".

We know all temptation first-hand. I'm not telling you anything you didn't already know. How could Christ know these same temptations? It's hard to fathom. Jesus was tempted in the same way you and I are.

But like Solomon wrote "***there is nothing new under the sun***"—the temptation we face isn't something unique to our generation, just repackaged.

But we have a **Sympathetic Savior who personally knows our weaknesses, who personally defeated our enemies, and who intercedes on our behalf**. He fought the temptation of thinking himself better than others. And he was victorious. He thought himself lower, by feeding of the 5000, by washing his disciples' feet, by making sure his mother was taken care of as he suffered on the cross. Incredibly, he didn't think himself better than those he knew best, even though he was.

He faced the pressures of the world. Pressures from the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, from those he had sat among as a young boy at the temple. Pressures to ditch his common followers, people too rude, too regular to be disciples of a great Teacher. And he also had pressures to conform. To conform to what these teachers said the law of Moses meant. Limiting steps on the Sabbath. Constant ceremonial washing hands. Not sitting among sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors. And he didn't go against the crowd just to be revolutionary, just to stick out and gain fame. He went against the respected teachers of the Law because it was the right thing to do, no matter how unpopular.

He also faced the temptations of the Devil. We heard about three specific temptations in our Gospel text. Temptations to put his physical needs above reverential worship of his Father. Temptations to test the goodness, love, and power of God. Temptations to usurp the power of his heavenly Father, just as the Devil had tried to do before he was cast down from heaven like lightning. And Jesus was victorious. Turning back every attack of Satan with the most effective weapon—the Word of God, quoting passage after passage.

But the Devil didn't throw in the towel after our Gospel reading. He had too much to gain. All would be lost if Jesus tripped up once. God wouldn't be perfect. Mankind wouldn't be redeemed. Anarchy, Satan, would reign supreme. His quest to overthrow God from his throne would be vindicated. But he failed. Christ was tempted, yet was without sin.

But he didn't live a perfect life to be our moral infomercial. His life isn't recorded so we can be more like Jesus—we strive to, but we fail. Because we aren't the Son of God. Because we know that, by nature, our 'after' picture was so much different from his. We faced the temptations he did and we fell into them, we gave into their advances. This is why Christ came. This is why he had to live perfectly. He lived a perfect life in our place, on our behalf. This is why he did what he did, because we could not, because we did not.

And he ascended into heaven to take the throne he now occupies, the throne that is filled with his gracious presence, the throne that the writer to the Hebrews speaks of. This is where our Great High Priest sits. Waiting for us to be with him, inviting us to bring our requests before him, reminding us of the mercy and grace he extends to us.

And we need this mercy and grace. We know our sin. We know our failings. We know our shortcomings. But we know our God. We know his Son. We know his perfection. We know the times he succeeded in the face of worldly pressures. We know the times he overcame sin. We know he did this for us.

We know he invites us to come to his throne. Where he intercedes on our behalf. Where he points us to his wounds, when the Devil points out our sin. This is where we go when we need to be reminded of his love.

His love is the confession we cling to. When we profess our faith together, as we will shortly with the Nicene Creed, we are confessing that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit loved us enough to enact a plan for our salvation. That God the Father loved us enough to send his one and only Son to die on our behalf. That God the Son loved us enough to live perfectly, suffer, and die for us. That God the Holy Spirit loved us enough to work faith in our hearts so that each of us might personally take hold of what the Son won for us.

Because what he did changes our 'after' picture. In the face of temptation, we too stand triumphant and confident. Confident that we are forgiven because of what the Lamb has done. Confident because he has defeated our enemies. Confident that he has given us the only tool we need to do the same—the WORD of God. Confident because we have a Great High Priest who intercedes on our behalf, a **Sympathetic Savior, who personally knows our weaknesses, who personally defeated our enemies, and personally intercedes on our behalf**. AMEN.

1 Thessalonians 5:23,24—May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Amen.