Hebrews 2:14-18 Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil) 15and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. 16For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham’s offspring. 17For this reason, he had to become like his brothers in every way, in order that he would be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, so that he could pay for the sins of the people. 18Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This year has been extraordinary, hasn’t it? In our lifetimes we have never experienced anything like the things that happened this year. For that matter most of us had never even heard the word: pandemic! But here we are in the midst of one. We will admit that in this past year, this pandemic of Covid-19 has radically changed our world. Right now it is changed socially and economically. What we are anxious about is whether or not our world will stay changed and what exactly that means for us?

To me, the biggest challenge of this year has been not having services. The times we were shut down were troublesome, because I value the souls under my care and I value gathering together to worship. As a church, I value the strength we gain from each other, the fellowship we share, the care and compassion of fellow Christians and sometimes, it is just a matter of getting out some place to do something different for the week. There is so much value in our faith, the practice of that faith in worship, to opening our hearts and mouths to the praise and honor of God. But this past year we were hindered here and there from doing so.

We are still somewhat hindered. My heart goes out to members who are filled with fear. It doesn’t matter if the fear is full blown or just a little itch at the back of your mind, it is still there. “I don’t want to get sick! I don’t want to put others at risk! I want to do what is right and safe!” Then there are those who while they have the previous thoughts also end up thinking: “But I can’t stand being cooped up! I can’t wait to get out and see people and do something, anything because this seclusion is driving me nuts!” Of course, I want to remind you that it is not the seclusion that is driving you nuts. It is probably you!

I point that out all too aware of the fact that we are our own worst enemies. I have treasured the words of James 1:14-15 for a long, long time now. They say this to us: **“But each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.”** That passage tells us we are our own worst enemies. We don’t realize that many of our troubles and trials actually come from us! That’s why I constantly remind my confirmands and anyone in a class that our sinful flesh is one of our greatest enemies because it is us and often we don’t see it!

As you are contemplating those words, let me share with you something I ran across on my social media pages. At first, I thought it was a bit light weight but the more I thought about it I realized the wisdom here. *“Joy equals Jesus Over Yourself. Think about it! What is joy? How can I be joyful while suffering? How can I be joyful in the face of extreme pain? If I focus on myself I validate the pain, I rationalize the pain, and I complain about the pain. If I focus on myself I drive deeper and deeper into the theology of me, and despair is all I know. If I focus on Jesus things begin to brighten, because He brings me something “I” cannot produce on my own. He brings me peace, hope, and love. Grace upon grace! Forgiveness that I cannot find anywhere else than on the cross where my Savior died the wretched death in my place. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. Take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) He also said, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) Therefore, if I take my eyes off of myself in the midst of suffering, and I point my eyes to Jesus, I will overcome! To God be the glory! In Him there is true joy! In Him there is true peace! In Him I put my hope! Look to Jesus this Christmas season and be filled with inexpressible joy!”*

People, take those words home and read through them a few more times. Better yet, take and make a copy and enlarge it and post it where you can read it all the time! These words are true! And I am going to emphasize their truth as we look at the words before us today. Our theme will be: **JESUS, MY BROTHER, MY SAVIOR!**

There is no doubt that the context of the verses here is Jesus Christ. Our text is found in the book of Hebrews, an epistle that I believe written by the Apostle Paul, written for those of Jewish descent in the Christian church and written for those of Jewish descent who needed to contemplate the wonder of Jesus. This book is in essence a small commentary on the Old Testament, a commentary which explains just how Jesus fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament prophets. The book of Hebrews is extremely valuable in that it helps us to clearly see how Old Testament and New Testament mold together perfectly.

In the section before us, the writer is helping us grasp the importance of Jesus being true God and true man. That is first seen in verse 10 -11 of our reading for today. 10-11 say, **“Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings. 11For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers.”**

Notice the sequence of information. The passage speaks of God, the creator of all, the preserver of all, as desiring the salvation of mankind. That’s the line: **“in leading many sons to glory.”** The next line tells us how God carried that out: **“to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings.”** In other words, the Father sent Jesus, the author of our salvation, into our world, to be a part of our world, to endure the trials and tribulations of our world, even to the point of his sufferings and death on the cross. God did this for us. Pay attention and you realize Jesus did this for us as the one sent.

 Verse 11 tells us why. **“For the one who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father.”** Jesus is the one who sanctifies, that is, he makes us holy and perfect before God the Father. We, the sinners, are the ones being sanctified, yes, made holy and perfect before God the Father, because as the previous verse says, it was God’s desire to lead us to glory, to save us, and he did it through the suffering Jesus. All of this so that we could be considered the “brothers” of Jesus. Let’s really let that wonderful phrase sink in for us.

 We translate “brothers” because that’s the actual word used. It is the general word of both the Old and New testaments that designates relationship, close relationship, namely that of being a family. We are a part of the family of God. We are the siblings, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, united with the Heavenly Father because of what Jesus has done. The next few verses, all quotes from the Old Testament, are given to show that even back then this was God’s viewpoint, God’s desire and God’s goal for all of mankind, to be his family. Because as we hear so often, “God so loved us.” Why? Because in Jesus every single human being has the potential, the reality of becoming a child of God and an heir of eternal life. We are told all of this because we need to grasp the importance we are to God. We are his children.

 Now our verses that we highlighted go on and say this: **“Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil).”** What did Christ accomplish by becoming our brother, by sharing our humanity? The text points first of all to another enemy, Satan, the Devil. Please note that our English translations speak of “destroying” the devil, which we take to mean totally annihilated, totally gone. That English word is a bit too strong. The Greek word actually means “to render inoperative, to nullify, to make idle or ineffective or to render impotent. That’s what Jesus has done. He has made Satan ineffective and impotent against those who believe! In other words, Satan’s power is ineffective to us but Satan is still in the world working to destroy. He is rendered ineffective for us who believe.

 But let’s talk the big point of Satan brought out here. Death was the hold that the devil had over man. Remember, the death we are speaking of here is the horror of eternal damnation and not just the rather simple physical passing of people from this world. This is spiritual death. By bringing sin into the world, the Devil with Adam and Eve’s help, brought death to man, the loss of God’s goodness and grace on a spiritual level, yes, the loss of our perfection and holiness. Because of that loss we face a terrible wage, namely eternal death and damnation in hell. The result of this is the sinners’ lifelong slavery spent cringing in fear as Satan cracks the horror of death’s whip, the horror of eternal death.

 But no more, our text tells us. Jesus, our brother, has nullified the devil and neutralized his ultimate weapon of death. To accomplish this he “**shared the same flesh and blood”** Our text reveals more when it says, **“For this reason, he had to become like his brothers in every way, in order that he would be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, so that he could pay for the sins of the people.”** He took this on, became a man, that he might die our punishment in his holy death and free us from our bondage and fear to the Devil. Jesus used that very thing with which Satan was bullying and battering man to defeat Satan. Satan, like some vicious animal has been chained. Now if some still die eternally from his attack and bite it is because they have strayed to close to Satan, they mistake Satan as a pet all the while walking away from the Prince of Life. Because it is made clear, very clear that Jesus paid for the sins of the people. He is our Savior. God come to save us. This is everything to us!

 By taking on our humanity, Jesus has defeated Satan for us. We couldn’t do it on our own. Even when Adam and Eve were perfect, Satan was clever enough to get them to sin. Now, as sinners, against this Satan our natural master, you and I don’t stand a chance. Thank God for Jesus. Jesus won the victory where we couldn’t. Jesus nullified the power of Satan taking away the sting of death and the fear of eternal damnation. Through faith in Jesus we are no longer a people who have to jump or even cringe when Satan cracks his whip of death, because Jesus paid for our sins!

 Again please remember that we are speaking of eternal spiritual death. The physical death that is also a part of our world as a result of sin, was God’s gift to mankind to get them out of the sinful world and all the difficulties sin was going to bring. We tend to forget that. Physical death is our God calling us from this sinful world to himself, to eternal life with him. If you are fearful of physical things, then remind yourself of Jesus and what Jesus truly has done for us. We are God’s children who have the gift of eternal life in us. Life because of God’s grace in Jesus. Because of this, I remind you, there is no fear of physical death for the believer!

 Listen to what else our text tells us. “**Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** Here are total words of comfort. Here is where I will direct your thoughts back to that statement about joy. When we focus on Jesus everything is better, endurable, workable, get through—able! Because Jesus is there to help us. I fear that all too often we forget to use the help, the peace, the hope, the guidance, the wisdom, the joy of Jesus in our lives.

 It is probably a true statement to say: “The un-tempted can have no compassion, the sin conquered can lend no assistance.” Translation: If you haven’t faced what I face, you won’t get the struggle. If you have and got swallowed up in it, you really don’t have help to offer. Such is our human plight. But Jesus is different. He was tempted in every way as we are and he was victorious and sinless. He knows what we face. Our temptations and trials are a special concern for Jesus and he stands ready to champion us against every evil assault. Jesus can help us nullify the temptations of Satan and win the victory against this great and deadly enemy of ours.

 Have we forgotten the promise of God in regard to temptations? 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 says, **“So let him who thinks he stands firm be careful that he does not fall. No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.”** God is with us to help us endure and win. God will strengthen because of our brother Jesus. Our brother is there to help and guide, to encourage and comfort, to carry us when think we can no longer go on.

 What wonderful words for us. To see how God has acted with his Son not just for our eternal life and salvation but to give us help and support in all the struggles we face in this world. Of course, remember, if the baby just sits, it will never learn to walk. If the man only walks, he will never enjoy the run or truly be in the race. We need encouragement and help in our faith. Jesus is just the one for the job. That’s why he became our brother and our Savior. Amen.