

Sermon Sexagesima 2021

February 7, 2021

Hebrews 4:12;

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on Hebrews 4:12: **“the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**

As we hear our Lord’s parable this morning, there’s such a fitting image there as He gives the key to understanding it. He speaks those words, **“The seed is the Word of God.”** And you can fit the pieces together as He connects each part to real life experiences that we all see with regard to the Word and peoples’ responses to it. The differing soils, the differing circumstances. Some of them warnings to us, the last encouragement. But in the midst of it is the seed. The seed that I’ve mentioned before is so recklessly strewn, right? It doesn’t make sense for this sower to cast this seed in these places that aren’t going to be conducive to the final fruit bearing of the plants, and yet that’s just what He does. We talked about that generosity of our God last week, and there it is again. Just recklessly cast this seed around.

And think about seeds. They’re quite miraculous, aren’t they? My understanding is that scientists still aren’t quite sure as to what motivates the seed to begin growing. You know, you have this seed dormant and dry, but then you add water to it, and you see that it was never dead. It was alive. And that life fits with the Word of God. You all, I’m sure, have heard that phrase of planting seeds. You know, you might talk to someone who isn’t a believer, and they might not be receptive to hearing, but you plant the seed and trust that it will grow. It won’t look alive, but you plant it. And this is that Word. That living Word. **“the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**

As we hear that verse again, I want to focus today on that Word. I want to focus on how that Word is living and active. And as I do this, I’ll make the point that the Word is historical, it’s surgical, and it’s performative. But all of those describe how it’s living. This Word is living and active.

Now as I say that, I remember when I was in the process of leaving Roman Catholicism and was basically an American Evangelical. I remember at that time reading and memorizing this verse and loving it. Yes, this Word of God is living and active! But what did I think of when I thought of this Word? I thought of the Bible. And how was it living and active? Well, it was living and active because of it’s depth. You know that depth that it has where you can read or hear the same verse time and again, and then one day it strikes you in an entirely

different light? That's awesome when that happens isn't it? It's really amazing, but that's all I thought this meant.

But I was listening to a presentation recently that made that great point. We as Christians need to understand that this Word isn't just static. It's not just information in a book that we read and hear again and again and get the depth and are struck by that depth. Now don't get me wrong, like I said it's awesome when that happens, but understand what this means. And to do that, let's go back to that question I just asked. Is the Bible just a book? When you think of God's Word do you just think of that book? Many of us in our culture in American Christianity think just that, that it's this compilation of these records of words. That it's knowledge. But this Word is more than a book, it's a living Word. It is the *viva vox Dei*. It is the Living Voice of God. Do you open your Bible and think of that way? No? Then do. Realize it is God speaking to you. Realize also that He speaks to you as that Word is preached. He is speaking to you now. Sure, it's just me this vessel of clay, but God is speaking to you through this weak and fragile vessel that you're looking at. Does it mean that I'm not fallible? No. If I step away from that revelation of Scripture, I'm breaking the vow of my ordination and you're hearing a man. But when I'm preaching that Word, that living Word is coming to you, to your ear; the organ of faith as Luther called it.

So, then in light of that, how is that Word living? Well, like I said, it's historical. Now, as I say that, I think we think of this aspect the most. We think of how there is all of this historical data that's recorded in these pages, and that's what it's there for. However, understand something, Christians. This isn't just historical data written down that you could know about these ancient people, the Israelites, if you'd like to be historically literate and academically minded. No, this living Word is more than that. It's history that reveals God to you. How so? Because as you see God revealing Himself in history in the history in that book. And as you hear that, He's putting you in that story too. This book is your story as a Christian. It's your family History, it's your History. And as I say that I don't mean that it's something where you focus on making it your own. No. Look at it and understand that it makes you it's own. You're job isn't to look and say, "how can I fit this in my life?" No. The Word works on you and makes you a part of it's life. The Word comes to you and baptizes you and you are joined to Jesus. You are joined to His body, the Church—mind you, this is the Church throughout time. It's the Church of Adam, the Church of Eve. It's the Church of Abel, that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of David, and Isaiah and Daniel. It's the Church of Peter, James, John, Paul. That's your story now, because you are integrated in their story.

I was reading a book about the liturgy this week that made that point. It was describing how when you come into the liturgy of the Divine Service, the external structure of it, what you see in Church is the Word proclaimed and grabbing you to bring you into the narrative.

It's giving you new life in that life of Christ and His story. So, this living word is historical, it's revelation of God and of God's actions in History that you might be joined to that History.

Second, then, this Word is living in that—and I wasn't sure how else to say this, but in saying—it's surgical. You might be wondering where that came from—although if you watched my devotion this week, you might know. It's from that word, "two-edged sword." I was reading Dr. Kleinig's commentary on this—the commentary I'm using for our study on Hebrews on Wednesdays—and I was reminded that he says in there that this "sword" is more like a knife; like a knife a surgeon uses. Think about the image of this sword, this knife: it's **piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

As I noted in my devotion, I couldn't help but think of my aunt and her cancer diagnosis. I always think cancer is such a great analogy for sin. It's something that grows in you, but can be removed. It's presence is deadly, but there are treatments. Even after you remove it and while you're treating it, there are effects. But in this case the illustration fits that much more aptly. You see my aunt had endometrial cancer. This had grown all over her abdominal cavity. Some it had sadly even grown onto her Inferior Vena Cava, that vein that carries blood back to the heart from the lower portion of the body. The issue with this that was so challenging is that the cancer could not be cut off of the vein. You see if there was the slightest slip of the scalpel and the vein was cut, there would be no time to reclose it as the blood would exit the vein so quickly that my aunt would have died from the loss of the blood. That knife was not able to divide, to pierce like the Word of God can. In fact, as I was reading Dr. Kleinig's commentary on this, he said this about it, *"When wielded by God himself, [the knife of the Word] can pierce exactly to the points of "division" that separate one human function from another, distinguishing what appears united and dividing what seems indivisible. And it does this without killing its patient!*

Now, as we say this, that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt sometimes. Think about how sometimes someone applies that knife to you. It hurts, doesn't it? You hear how you're not doing something that Jesus tells you to, or vice-versa. Or when someone explicitly confronts you about a sin. It hurts. The Law of God hurts our sinful nature. But yet, we still need that application. God is able to cut off those masses of our sin our without us bleeding out in the process. However, we have to be strengthened in our faith in Him to be willing the surgery happen. That's to say we have to cling to that Word that the surgery may happen and we might know that His tried and true hand will be able to heal us for eternity with Him.

Likewise, we also need to apply that Word as we look at the world. For example, parents, I don't know if you saw the educational standards that are coming down the pike for Illinois. They are grounded in what is called Critical Theory, and they are going to hammer the

idea for students that there “is not one ‘correct’ way of doing or understanding something,” and bring to the fore discussions of things like their sexual identities. Christians, while we must remain humble in our acknowledgments of our wrongs, that humility must rest on the one correct truth of God’s Word and it must be our surgical knife to cut away the sinful ideas of the world as we approach them as well. And hopefully, you can see how this Word is surgical.

So, the Word is living in how it is historical, surgical, and finally it is also performative. That means the Word does what it says. This is clear in that passage from Isaiah. Look at what he says there: **“as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** When God speaks it happens. The Word does what it says. You hear me speak in this way all the time. And hopefully you hear how it applies to you. Think about it once more, though.

When you hear Christ on the cross speak the Word, **“Father forgive them, they know not what they do,”** what does that mean? It means by that very Christ who was on the cross bleeding and dying for the cost of your sin, that sin was being forgiven; Christ speaking and the forgiveness happening. It means that when that Word was spoken with the water poured over you, you were baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that God put His Name on you. It means that when you hear that absolution, I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you are returned to that baptismal grace in its purity with your sin gone. And I’m guessing you’ll know what’s next. When you hear “This is my body given for you for the forgiveness of your sins.” You can know His body is there and the same for the blood. They are there for you by the authority of the Christ whose Word performs what it says, and they are there for you that would be forgiven.

Yes Christians, that Word is performative, it does what it says. It’s surgical, it cuts the sin from you by God’s Law and His Word of condemnation, but it heals you with His life-giving Word of forgiveness in the Gospel, and it’s historical bringing you into the story of our God and His salvation. This Word, Christians, is living. Just like that seed that fell on the ground in the parable. Cling to it, then. Cling to it steadfastly like that soil that bears fruit one hundred fold. Cling to it so that you will be that fruit here and in the gracious Kingdom of the One who speaks to you in that Word, our precious Lord Jesus. Amen.