

Rev. Seth D Bode + Sermon 287 + Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

THE WORD OF GOD AND ITS POWER

Epistle – Hebrews 4

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, even being able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account.

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Holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling,

➤ Choose your weapon!

Something you might hear in a film about a fight. What will the hero choose?

- What is the best tool for the job?

For Captain America, it's a shield. For Iron Man, it's a suit. For Thor, it's a hammer. For Batman, it's a number of vehicles and gadgets. For Superman, it's muscles. For the incredible Hulk, it's a drink, a formula that gives him big green muscles. For Black Panther or Wolverine, it's claws. For hobbits, it's a dagger that glows when the enemy is near. Usually it's something made out of the hardest material known to man – Vibranium, Adamantium, Mithril. These are all exciting, but they are fantasy and legend.

- As we grow older, the question becomes more important.

During my summer job as a landscaper, my boss said he didn't care what tool I used, as long as it got the job done the best and the fastest. I took that as a life lesson. I wasn't going to kick around dirt, I was going to use a shovel. For many plants, I wasn't going to trim with a hand trimmer; I was going to use something powered by gas.

What tools do you use to get the job done? Maybe you use online billing instead of a ledger; a stylus instead of a pencil; a phone instead of a computer.

Today God tells us how He gets the job done. It all has to do with His Word. His Word is found in the Bible, and so this book you might call ...

God's Tool Of Choice

- God chooses this tool of His Word.
 - It is made out of living, not dead, ink.

It has spoken to people across the centuries throughout the whole world. It has spoken to the coffin.

- It is active and it gets the job done.

It accomplishes the purpose for which God desires it (Isa. 55:11).

- In our lesson, God compares the Word to a sword.
 - It is sharp.

In Ephesians 6:17, this Word of God is called "the sword of the spirit." It's made out of something stronger than vibranium, adamantium, or mithril. It is made out of God's thoughts that He wishes to

share with us. When God's thoughts were shared with Jews on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37, they were "cut to the heart." It said something meaningful to them. It tore them up and pierced them where other blades would have blunted and lodged mid-stroke.

- It "bites on both sides."

That was the old-fashioned way of saying it has two edges. The person with a double-edged sword wastes no swings. The swordsman can easily wield it and slice in more than one direction.

- It is incisive.

The word is "dividing." It means "to pass through a three-dimensional solid." We are told ...

- It pierces.

There is a division or separation built into this piercing. It pairs with two sets of separated things. One is soul and spirit. To pierce soul and spirit, you would need something different than steel or physical material. You would need something that cuts the unthinkable. We can hardly differentiate the soul and the spirit. All of Scripture suggests that they are the same thing. The difference between them is unseen.

Similarly it severs joints and marrow. Admittedly, these aren't right next to each other in the body. But when words like this are used in describing a person's insides, it's often an emotional pain that extends to the body. When the stress of fear or sadness is so great that your body aches, it is a powerful effect. It is unseen.

- It critiques.

The sword of God's Word cuts and critiques or judges the ideas and thoughts of the heart. That would be impossible unless the Word knew what our ideas and attitudes are, could look inside us, could say something meaningful about us.

When God's tool of choice does this critiquing a.k.a. judging, that's when we know it's at its best. It tells us to be perfect, for the Lord our God is perfect. It shows us our sin and how each human being has not been perfect. If God were to keep a record of wrongs, no one could stand (Psa. 103). In the gospels, this tool of God's choice exposed the evil thoughts of the experts in the Law. In the 9th-10th commandments, this tool of God's choice demonstrates that God knows and condemns sinful thoughts as well as words and actions. In the 3rd commandment, God's tool of choice reminds us we have not received God's Word properly.

- But only one edge of God's Word kills; the other edge makes alive.

- God's tool of choice comes from the mouth of the Son of God.

In the song of the Suffering servant (Isa. 49:2), the Father has made the Son's mouth into a sharp sword which He holds in the shadow of His hand. By the end of the Bible, in Revelation (1:16), the sword is coming out of the mouth of the Alpha and Omega, Jesus Christ on His throne in exaltation. He has come to use this tool of choice, this sword, this weapon, for conquest. But in the conquest of Christ Jesus, He only cuts in order to make alive. This has happened already in Deuteronomy, where God says He kills and He makes alive. Nothing is more powerful and incisive than God's Law and God's Gospel. In Holy Communion, God's tool of choice shows how Jesus can distribute the unthinkable, his own body and blood.

- The church militant uses it for the living.

We are told to correctly handle the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Psa. 149:6, 1 Peter 4:1

- It is even used for those who are close to Him.

A sword would pierce the soul of Jesus' own mother (Luke 2:35). Those closest to Christ Jesus would learn how powerful His Word of life truly is. It meant His own death. His own joints were dislodged, His mental faculties were laden with our sins, His soul was torn from His body. This is what has made us alive, God's tool of choice. His good news, His Word carves life out of an awful place, the death of the Son of God. It hews out of stone a resurrection for all believers. In fact, one dot or scribble of the Word is greater than heaven and earth, because it will never pass away (Matt. 5:18).

So arm yourselves with the same mind of Christ, the same tool of God, His living and active Word. Amen.