

Hebrews 4:12-13 - 2nd Sun. before Lent [Sexagesima] [31.1.2016]

God's Word at work - in you!

¹² For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are. ¹³ Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done. [NLT]

I'm sure that the least of our worries when signing the consent form for an operation is whether the surgeon will use the sharpest tools possible. When operating on especially sensitive parts - like the eye - laser-beams are used. Sharp tools are able to be used for very precise incisions so that the minimum damage is caused, and the maximum effect is achieved.

Surgery is not done lightly - just so that somebody can cut into a person. Surgery is performed when there is a real need to cut through to the 'innermost place', and to remove that which is damaging to the body, so that healing can take place.

This is what the writer of Hebrews speaks of here, when he points to the reason for which

God's Word is at work in you!

God's Word is at work in our lives - especially when there is something which threatens our eternal life. For those first recipients the fear of persecution was very real. They believed that they could save their lives, by hiding behind their Jewish origins, and so they tried to combine Jewish customs with the Christian beliefs. What harm could be in that. After all, was it not the same God that the Christians and the Jews worshipped?

One has to understand that the Jewish faith was protected by law, while the Christian faith was seen as being a heresy which was punishable by death. So it is quite understandable that people wanted to shelter behind the protection of the law.

Is the God the Jews worship truly the same God as the one we Christians

worship, however? As long as the Jews fail to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah - as the Saviour - we have to state very clearly that it is not true that we worship the same God.

God's Word is at work in our lives - for us the danger is of becoming too much part of the world around us, and so losing our identity as people of Christ. Is it still visible to others that we are different to those who are not Christian? Do people see at our place of work that we belong to Christ - in the way in which we do our work, in our financial dealings, in the way we fill in our tax return? And when we are at play - when we are at a party - is it visible that we have our life from Christ?

The call to be more tolerant may intimidate us. But what does it really mean to be tolerant? Surely we are not intolerant when we testify to the fact that it is only by faith in Jesus Christ that anybody can be saved? [That would be like saying that somebody is intolerant, because they have found the only way to be healed of a certain disease] We are not intolerant when we stand up for our beliefs, and clearly show by how we live, what is right or wrong.

The author Philip Yancey writes about his wife working in a hospice for people of different backgrounds. Her Christian faith is something she wears - she does not speak about it. Not that she is ashamed of her faith, only she knows that not much is achieved by beating others over the head with Christian propaganda. Her actions speak much louder than words, so that many of the people she has dealt with want to know what it is that makes her the way she is - and then she is able to give them a clear answer!

Why is it so important to 'wear' our faith in the world we live in? We are shown here that if we do not do so, there is a very real danger of losing out on the 'Promised Land' - eternal life -, which God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ. That is why God's Word in all its power must work in us.

This Word is sharper even than a laser-beam, as it cuts **deep into our innermost thoughts and desires**. Unlike operations where it is the skill of the surgeon which is important, here it is the Word of God which has the power and the ability

to operate on us - to clearly show us what it is that threatens our lives, as it **exposes us for what we really are.**

God's Word is at work in our lives - cutting away those things which have no place in our lives. But his concern is not for us to be stripped bare for all to see! God does not simply want to expose our weaknesses so that we are made to feel helpless.

His Word wants to reach us right at the centre of our lives however, because we are in need of radical surgery. God wants to expose the lie that we must live like everybody else if we want to amount to anything in our world. He wants to remove the fear from our lives that tempts us to submitting to the values and morals of the world we live in.

That is why God's Word works in us, so that we will keep the life which he has given us. His Word works in us, so that we may come to him once again, and so that we may bring all those things to him which weigh us down.

If we are to really have the life God offers us, we need to submit to the examination of God's Word - because it alone gives us the balance we need for real life. And then we must also submit to the necessary surgery to remove what it is that threaten our life. These things will be different for each one of us. For one it may be the 'heart' - the things we love doing, but which take us further away from God and his Word for us. For another it may be the fear of acknowledging who we are in a world that mocks Christ.

We may do this, because we are reminded that God knows us - he saw through us long ago. So we need not be ashamed to tell him our darkest secrets - he knows about them all in any case. We need to hesitate to tell him of our shortcomings - he knows all about our failures, our impatience with others, our lack of faith. He knows of the things to which cling as if they give our lives meaning - even though they make us feel guilty (and that is not simply that we like chocolate).

God's aim, however, is that we separate ourselves from the things which keep us separate from him. His Word can sever what has kept us bound to these

things.

God's powerful Word addresses you - not to cut you down, but to lift you up, so that you may live with him. Will you sign the consent form for the operation?