

## Readings

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

## Sermon

I have a question for you. What is the point of a sermon? I don't expect you to answer but I did some thinking and I came up with these 3 answers:

- 1) To spend some time focusing on the Word of God
- 2) To reach you in a way that is relevant to your life
- 3) To encourage you in your life as a disciple

The first point, 'to spend some time focusing on the Word of God' is I hope self-explanatory and shortly we will spend some time looking at our reading from the book of Hebrews.

The second point is a challenge, 'to reach you in a way that is relevant to your life'. There is no way that what I say today will reach all of you. But my hope is that there is somebody here today for whom this sermon is particularly relevant. If you find that it is you then please do tell me after the service.

The third point 'to encourage you in your life as a disciple' is another challenge because it assumes that a) you know what a disciple is and b) that you believe you are a disciple. Many people, even those who have been Christians for a long time, do not see themselves as disciples of Jesus. They see that as the role of 'A Level Christians'. When I said that were any of you mentally nodding and agreeing with me. I heard exactly that statement on a preaching course that I attended recently and I must admit I was one of the mental noddors, if you see what I mean. But then we were given a definition of a disciple and it changed my mind. Here is the definition - "A disciple is someone who is learning to live the way of

Jesus in their own context at this moment". We are all learning and there are no exams - no matter where we are in our own journey we are all disciples.

Let's turn to our reading from Hebrews. There is some uncertainty about who wrote this 'letter' although several authors have been suggested including Paul, Luke, Barnabas and Philip. It was written to Hebrew Christians who may have been considering a return to Judaism. They were probably being fiercely persecuted by Romans and by their fellow Jews. Christ had not returned and they needed to be reassured that Christianity was true and that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

We heard a very short passage from Hebrews today, just 5 verses in total, yet there is so much here. I want to split the passage into four parts. Turn with me now to that reading in the Bible and I will briefly explain the four parts before looking in more detail at each. The first part is the first few words of verse 12 and simply says 'For the word of God is living and active'. The second part is everything up to the end of verse 13, describing God's word as sharper than a double-edged sword, its ability to judge us, and then goes on to say that because God sees everything then we are laid bare before him. The third part is all of verse 14 and 15 referring to Jesus as our great high priest and his ability to sympathise with us. And the final part is verse 16 which encourages us to approach his throne with confidence.

Hang on to those four things if you can, the word of God, ourselves laid bare to an all-seeing God, Jesus our great high priest, and approaching with confidence, and now let's look at each in more detail, following along in your Bible.

Verse 12, "For the word of God is living and active". The word of God is not simply a collection of words from God, or a vehicle for

communicating ideas; it is living, life-changing, and dynamic as it works in us. There's a story about a man who was a lifelong thief, a burglar, a house-breaker of many years. He knew that what he did was wrong and grew to hate himself for his inability to stop. One day in desperation he went into a church in London and went down on his knees to pray, asking God to free him from his sins. He stayed there wringing his hands and praying to a God that he had turned his back on. Finally he looked up and he saw the commandment "Thou shall not steal" and he realised that this was a promise from God rather than a command. His life was changed forever.

We may not have experienced something as powerful as that but perhaps like me, you are moved by particular passages in the Bible. If we truly believe the words in verse 12 then surely we need to expose ourselves to the word of God more often. There are many ways in which we can and I would like to suggest some. How about using the pew Bible more often to follow the readings? Or rereading the sermon each week on the church website? The website also displays a daily Bible passage. Yet another way might be to subscribe to daily Bible readings, booklets that guide you through Bible passages with interpretation and prayer. If any of these suggestions appeal to you and you would like some help to use them then please ask.

If we really are disciples and we want to learn more about how to live like Jesus then we need the word of God.

Moving on to the second part of the passage. The rest of verse 12 talks about the Word being sharper than a double edged sword penetrating, dividing and judging our thoughts and attitudes. And then in verse 13 we are reminded that God sees everything. We are laid bare before the eyes of God and we must account to him.

These are words that are reminiscent of King David's great Psalm 139. Nothing can be hidden from God. He knows about everyone, everywhere, and everything about us is wide open to his all-seeing eyes. God sees all we do, knows all we think. Even when we are unaware of his presence, he is there. When we try to hide from him, he sees us. We can have no secrets from God. There is nowhere we can go to escape his presence. We are exposed before God and how does this make us feel? We could be fearful of facing a holy and majestic God, or perhaps we may be ashamed, maybe there is something within us that we don't like and we cannot believe that God could forgive us. If you find yourself in this place then do not despair but turn instead to these next few verses of Hebrews Chapter 4.

In this third part of the passage, verses 14-15 tell us that our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, was tempted – in every way, just as we are tempted. Yet, he was without sin. He resisted. He said no and we can do likewise. To the small temptations; to the far more significant ones. And Jesus has promised to be with us in order that we have the victory! He does not just sympathise with our weaknesses but because he lived as a man in our world he can also empathise.

And now the fourth part - we read in verse 16 the most amazing thing. We are encouraged to approach His throne with confidence so we can receive his mercy and his grace in times of need. And “Grace” means a sympathetic compassion which is prepared to reach out even to the undeserving. Compassion and kindness, grace and mercy, are there when we face our times of need. This is not so much about when we fail, as it is when we face hard times and are confronted with temptations which threaten to overwhelm us.

Prayer is our approach to God, and we are to "come with confidence". Come with reverence because he is your King but also come with bold

assurance because he is your Friend and Counsellor. He loves you unconditionally.

I asked you earlier what is the point of a sermon and gave you three answers.

Answer 1 - To spend some time focusing on the Word of God. I hope that the time we spent in studying this passage together was helpful.

Answer 2 - To reach you in a way that is relevant to your life - remember I suggested that the message today would perhaps just reach one person. And please also remember that you can tell me afterwards if you are that person.

Answer 3 - To encourage you in your life as a disciple. To be a disciple is to recognise what God is saying to us and to live it out. We should seek out the word of God and allow it to work in us, and shape our lives.

Amen