

Sunday October 14th 2018
Life a Hot Knife Through Butter – Lawrence Peak

If one looks up a concordance one will find the greatest number of entries for “God” and “Jesus Christ” - and close on their heels comes entries for “The Word of God”.

We read in the gospels how this Word can be likened to a seed scattered far and wide - sometimes taking root and flourishing - sometimes left on hard ground to wither away.

We read how this Word can be a comfort and a strength to us; how it can be a true inspiration to help us in life in all sorts of ways;

And then in Hebrews we read this morning how it is also a two edged sword or a dagger! And if there is any doubt as to what the writer of the Hebrews means, he makes it quite clear what he means

“Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

This is a rather unsettling concept which leaves us, no doubt, distinctly uneasy for we feel more secure and comfortable if we can hide behind our airs and pretences, our facades and cover-up masks that we put on daily.

But the Word of God cuts through all of this like a hot knife through butter and before God we stand totally naked and exposed.

Suddenly our picture of

- A comfy God
- Our best buddy
- Our mate who will give us whatever we ask for - no matter how meagre the

scraps of our life that we deign to throw to Him”

- Our bodyguard who will cushion our life no matter what

Suddenly all these images start to fade and need to be reconsidered - they are under challenge by passages such as this one in Hebrews.

And Hebrews is not alone: In Psalm 139 we read

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I say surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me - even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like day for darkness is as light to you

And in Jeremiah 23 we find something equally unsettling

“Does not my Word burn like fire?” Asks the Lord “Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashed the rock to pieces?”

I suppose that at this stage we should clarify in our minds what we mean by the term “Word of God”. In his Gospel and Letters, John refers to Christ as the word.

“For there are three that bear record in Heaven, The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost and these three are one”.

But somehow it is broader than just Jesus of Nazareth, for the Word was present in the beginning as John tells us in the opening of his gospel.

Words convey meaning for us, they allow us to give messages and express ourselves. They are used to communicate and perhaps the best understanding of the term Word of God is in the context of

- * God expressing Himself,
- * giving us a message,
- * conveying meaning to us.
- * communicating with us.

And this would certainly include in a most special way our Lord, his extraordinary

life, his teachings and his death that was no ordinary crucifixion - a death that had a pivotal significance for all humankind - a significance that we can barely begin to understand.

But it would also include all the ways by which God seeks to express Himself, to communicate with us, be it through the scriptures, the counsel of others, the wonders of nature, our innermost urgings and conscience and even the more illuminated teachings in the other great religions of the world.

To me these are all manifestations of God's Word which can certainly be comforting and reassuring but as we have seen today can also shake us to the core as we are laid bare.

In our second reading we heard about the rich young ruler who came to Jesus. He was responsible, he was earnest, he certainly meant well and wanted to find fulfillment and satisfaction in life. He was God-fearing and obeyed all the commandments. He was a likeable young man whom Jesus loved - the Bible states that explicitly.

One of the great things about the Bible is its humanity. It gives so many pictures of so many people with whom we can identify. Ordinary people just like you and me, and we certainly can see ourselves in the shoes of this rich young man!

We are rich too. Use any world-wide criterion that includes all people on earth and we are all rich. We all have vast possessions by comparison with the majority of people on our planet. Like the young man we too mean well. We are not criminals, terrorists, thieves or murderers. We too want to find happiness and fulfillment. I am sure too that Jesus also loves us.

But the Word of God is like a sword cutting straight to the heart of the matter, and Christ immediately could see that there was this great obstacle between this man and God. "Go and sell all your possessions and give them to the poor"

How radical! How unnerving! How unnerving to think that Jesus might say something similar to us if he were standing here now.

Christ always made it clear that we need to get rid of anything that is an obstruction between us and God.

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell! And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell!

Get rid of them he says! Nothing is worth jeopardising our future with God!

It is too simplistic to say that we ALL need to give up ALL our possessions - for then we would also be poor and need to be sustained by someone else! Nor did Jesus tell every rich person to do that.

It is NOT too simplistic however to say that the Word of God will cut through any outside appearance and sham. And if there is some obstruction, some false God, some all-consuming passion that stops God's true Holy Spirit flowing into our lives, we should be ruthless in doing whatever is required to get rid of it.

God's Word is not all warm and fuzzy. It cut to the heart of that young man who went away sorrowful for in that encounter with Christ he was faced with the stark reality that he really did love his possessions more than His God. There were gods in his life that he worshipped more than the true God.

How is it for us? It may be money, or possessions, or climbing the corporate ladder, or sport or our children or paradoxically even religion itself!

There was a time when it was fashionable for evangelists to make out that we were nothing but rotten to the core - permeated by evil through and through and that our only hope was to see ourselves as wretched creatures needing to call on God's grace for salvation.

It IS true that we all fall short, far short, of God's blazingly pure standards and it IS true that we cannot earn God's favour and it IS true that we need to rely on His grace freely offered to be saved.

But we are not rotten through and through. I need only to see Mother Theresa or a Michelangelo, or listen to a Beethoven Symphony or see the myriad upon myriad of quiet saintly people the world over and in our local neighbourhood to know that we are not rotten through and through.

But I also know from the daily newspapers how selfish and cruel and degraded human beings can become. So often our papers are a sad daily litany of evil.

So it is more accurate to say that the human race is capable of ranging from base degradation all the way to highest nobility.

And I daresay we see something similar if we look into our own lives - occasionally I am almost noble and very very often I am at the other end of the spectrum - far removed from nobility.

And the writer of the Hebrews is saying that God sees it all. He sees the real me and the real you uncluttered by facades. He sees right into our hearts. He sees all our motives and hang-ups. He rejoices with our triumphs and continues to love us warts and all when we fall over and when our outlook becomes distorted or cynical.

At the beginning I said that the Word of God cut through the comfortable ideas - and our vision of a warm fuzzy God who would keep us secure, no matter what, would have to go. That simple-minded security would have to go. The God we created for our own comfort and reassurance would have to go.

And if all this is stripped away - do we have anything left? How can we face life if God sees through all our props and supports?

The Word of God also has a strong message of promise. When we tell someone "You have my word on it" we are making a promise a vow to keep this promise. And right through the scriptures God makes promises to us

- * He will always love us no matter what and who we are
- * He will never forsake us
- * He will give us the necessary strength to cope with all the circumstances of life in which we find ourselves
- * He will reveal the true meaning and beauty of life to us
- * He has prepared a place for us. A place to share with Him and to experience His loving presence for all eternity. A place of many mansions.

And He makes these promises no matter who we are. He sees us for what we really are warts and all and He **still** makes these promises to us.

All we need to do is to reach out to Him whose love already surrounds us. We need to acknowledge our need of Him. We need simply to draw upon His saving grace and we will already be on our way to a better and more fulfilling life.

So we may have disposed of many simplistic and naive ideas of God and His support. But in stripping away the coverings that can so easily cloud the issue, we have found promises of our God. Promises of His Word that are rock solid!

Rock solid promises that are for all eternity. Promises about the things that really matter in the eternal perspective.

The Word of God is often like a hot knife cutting through butter. It can expose us to the core and this can be terrifying. As we stand before our God with no excuses, no bargaining chips, no airs, no graces, no clout.

But the fact of the matter is that only when we are in this state can we hear clearly the true promises of God's Word.

Thanks be to God, Amen.