

Sermon on **Hebrews 4:12-13** for 21st Weekend of Pentecost
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

It happens from early on in life. You develop favorite things that you use often and sometimes use exclusively even though you have others. There is the favorite pacifier or nuk. Then there is the favorite blankie or teddy bear. As you get older it can get weirder. You have a favorite shirt or outfit for specific occasions. Recently I realized that I have a favorite knife. There have been times it is the only knife I'll use. It is dangerous, so I have to be careful with it, but it is so useful. It can cut the basics, but it's especially helpful for the toughest meats, cheeses, watermelon and pumpkin carving.

It is important to have the right "favorite things." Life in this world is not easy as a Christian seeks to live a godly life. As is today, so the early Christian church, there was persecution from without, but also spiritual persecution. The sinful nature desires what is against God's will – our conscience knows this, listening to greed like Gehazi did (2 Kgs 5). The sinful nature also desires that we look to ourselves for our own saving rather than to Christ like the rich young ruler (Mk 10). Many have become lukewarm to the faith, even walked away. How many have left St. Paul's and some have left the faith completely.

The writer to these Hebrew Christians presents the Word of God, which exposes the dangers that seek to pull us away from Christ Jesus, the only Savior and King. It implores us to encourage one another daily, so we aren't hardened in unbelief. It shows us Jesus as true God, yet taking on flesh for us. Don't give up. Don't follow the example of disobedience that is all around. Hold on to Christ. And how do you do that? Go to the Word of God. Let it be your favorite thing to the exclusion of all else. **Followers of Christ Maintain Proper Priorities. And that starts with the Word.**

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of 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" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

We don't like to be told we are wrong. Sometimes we may have had the thought that rather than face the music, or know the browbeating that will come, we would rather quit. You quit the team, the job, the relationship. You don't want to face up to what you did or the failure to be shown to you. I realize when I go to the Word of God, it is no dead thing, or old antiquated out of touch words of dead people that lost their value generations ago. As you read it, hear it, this Word is alive, and it is active, energy. And just like current running through a cord, you can be shocked if you do something foolish. But does that make it bad? No, God's Word trains us to realize where we have been living foolishly, sinfully, with our backs against God spurning him and misusing his goodness and grace. And we need a shock. Stop sinning. Wake up. The devil wants to have your soul. The devil wants you to ignore the shock, walk away, and end up in hell if he gets his wish.

These words cut us. They are sharp like a Roman soldier's short sword at his side, ready to slice this way and that to defend, to attack, to victor. The *Word of God is alive* and it can cut so clean and deep it gets down to the seemingly indivisible – *soul and spirit, joints and marrow*. It penetrates so deeply that it *exposes our thoughts and attitudes of the heart*. And how have they been? Would we like to stand before God and give an account of how we thought about other people, about what we thought about giving offerings to the Lord doing it grudgingly in our greed, or shamefully not at all? Would we like others to see exposed the lust in our hearts, the thoughts about someone not our spouse? Would we like our selfishness exposed, our pettiness, our anger to be aired for all to see, let alone the perfect God of justice who would demand an accounting? No, God help us! That would be the electric chair!

But God does know it whether we want him to or not. He gave his Word to penetrate our hearts of stone and sin and cut deep enough to expose the cancer and blockages that we have set up in sin. But what does he do? As an expert surgeon he cuts them out. He cleans us. He gives us a spiritual bone marrow transfusion – draining out the cancer and putting in Christ's perfection. His blood shed on the

cross covers over our sin, every one of them. His perfect obedience and merit is credited to our empty account that we can stand before God unafraid.

Don't run from the current, plug into it appropriately! The Word is a source of strength and energy connected to Christ and his love for us so that we can live for him. His strength allows us to bear the cross of saying "no" to our sinful nature. The forgiveness won for us on that cross motivates me and you to run to the Word rather than away from it. We don't have to hide like Adam and Eve who couldn't conceive that God could be merciful. We stop in our tracks and confess to God knowing he will cleanse us from every stain of sin. He sets us free to live, to run in the path of his commands, to truly love God and love our neighbor. That's what forgiveness does. That's what the Word which shocks shows us as it energizes us to truly live.

So plug in and fill up. It takes awhile to charge an electric car. It takes time to fill up a tank with fuel. How important to fill up though! We went out to eat as kids very rarely. Once a year on the way back from up North we would stop at McDonald's and we could order any meal we want. This was before free refills. Pretty special. And the other time was when mom had a baby, dad would take us out to eat while mom was recuperating. He wasn't much of a cook. We would go to Ponderosa for the buffet. And when we came looking like we weren't going to eat anymore, he would say, "I paid full fare for you, go make sure you're full." It would be foolish to stop growing in God's Word, to stop coming to God's house to worship, to praise, to encourage our fellow believers. The world will put many things in your path that will lure you away from God's Word – more money from work, more adventures or opportunities for the kids, more things that take your time and money with a promise that it will make life better, family better, better opportunities, but they can't. They don't. Only God does. And he has given us his Word. Because he loves us, he shocks us. Because he loves us, he saves us at great cost to himself. He paid full fare for us to be in heaven. Fill up on him and you will be full. Keep filling up and the overflow will be a blessing to you and those around you whether they realize it or not, even for generations.

My Great Grandpa wasn't a Christian early in his life. Great Grandma dropped enough hints and invitations that he went down to St. Lucas Lutheran in Milwaukee and took instruction. God blessed him with faith and he grew. They brought their son to church and he was encouraged to ministry and became a Lutheran Pastor. And he and his wife in turn brought their family to church and encouraged them to grow in the Word. His second daughter birthed me, and even though I was a naughty little kid who got a spanking after each service when I was younger, she didn't stop bringing me. And now I get to continue to grow in God's Word and share it with you. I want to help you grow. And so does another great grandson, Pastor O. And so does Pastor Smith and Mr. Kuschel and all of us do.

Keep God's Word your priority in life. It will bless you more than you can fathom. It leads you to Christ and his life. It shocks you when you need it to keep you from falling away. It shows you your Savior and eternal life that awaits. He paid full fare for you. So plug in, fill up and live for him. Let God's Word be your favorite thing. Hold on to Christ and his Word. And let it overflow to all around you. **Followers of Christ maintain proper priorities. And that starts with the Word.** Amen.