

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 15, 2017**  
**Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church**  
**Farmington, NM**

**Hebrews 4:12,13** 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. 13 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.

**“Going Under the Knife”**

Why are we here today? We are in these chairs because we know this is the right place for us to be. It's good for us to be here. This is the right thing for us to be doing right now. It's a spiritually healthy habit.

But why? Why do we think this is the right place for us to be? How do you know? Is it just a hunch? Did someone tell you this is what you should be doing on a Sunday morning when you could be sleeping in or doing a half-dozen other things? Are you unsure, but it just seems right, feels right?

As we look at these words from Hebrews chapter 4, only two verses, we will get into the mode of thinking we are here today in this church gathered to hear God's Word for the same reason why you go to the doctor. And before you get up and leave right in front of everyone, we can acknowledge that's not always the most comfortable place for us to be, but it's the right place, the place we need to be. Let's actually take the next step right away. You and I need God's Word like a patient needs to go under the knife.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us: **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.”** When you hear those words, I'd like you to picture God's Word as a skilled surgeon's scalpel. God's Word addresses our spiritual health. It works. Sometimes it works to get at spiritual rot and sickness and disease in our souls. Sometimes it cuts and scrapes and removes what is harmful inside us. But it always works. It always brings life and reenergizes life and boosts spiritual health and longevity. God says so. God promises.

A study conducted in 2012 revealed that only 19% of churchgoers personally read the Bible every day.<sup>1</sup> That's only 1% point higher than the people who rarely or never read the Bible. 14% said they read the Bible once a week while another 22% read it once a month or a few times each month. And remember, these are the people who are churchgoers. It doesn't include the significant portion of the population who call themselves Christians but never go to church or the growing percentage of people who have no interest in Christianity.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Stetzer. “New Research: Less Than 20% of Churchgoers read the Bible daily.” Christianity Today, 13 September 2012. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/september/new-research-less-than-20-of-churchgoers-read-bible-daily.html>

There seems to be a definite disconnect between what we know is good for us spiritually and what we actually do. Probably like the way we handle our medical issues. There are people who haven't been to the doctor in years. It's expensive. It's time consuming. It's a waste of time and money. So why bother? After all, if you feel ok or you know your own minor medical maladies, what good does it really do if you pay some overpriced expert to tell you what you already know? You know people how treat God's Word that same way.

Maybe they are even more skeptical. Maybe they grew up around Christians who had that Bible in a prominent place in their homes and went to church every Sunday, but acted just as poorly as everyone else. It might sound like a good idea to read the Bible, but apparently it just doesn't work. Sometimes you're even willing to give the Bible a try. You've heard from people who swear by it. It's worked for them. It's changed their lives. It's kind of like the people who recommend a strange, but strict diet or practice meditation or have found the miracle prescription that makes all the difference. You're willing to give it a trial period to see if you notice any tangible results.

But that's not the description we get of God's Word. We learn it is: **"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."** (Hebrews 4:12) It works. It is effective. But first you need to realize you need God's Word. Something could be wrong with you, inside you, deep inside your soul. But you don't know. And maybe you'd rather not know. Even if there is something not quite right, you can probably just handle it on your own. You don't want to make too big of a deal about it. You might actually make it worse by digging around, poking and probing. It might cause more issues than just letting it run its course. It's probably better just to leave it alone.

Sometimes setting up that annual or six month check up is the hardest part. You know you should, but it might mean hearing something you'd rather not hear. Avoiding the doctor doesn't make you healthy. Staying away from the recommended examinations doesn't mean everything is ok. It just means you don't know what you don't know. God's Word works. That's actually the scary part. If you let God's Word into your life and something isn't quite right, if God discovers something that isn't 100% healthy, it means you will have to change. And change can be painful. It means going under God's knife.

Even recognizing you have room for improvement, you could make some healthier changes in your spiritual life, doesn't calm your heart completely. Even if something abnormal is detected and the appropriate treatment is prescribed, it's scary to put yourself in someone else's hands, to let go of control. There is anxiety and uncertainty going under the knife. Inside every human heart lies a fear that I will be discovered. Something I enjoy is actually bad for me. My desires and longings and plans have been there for so long, they start to get entangled with the good thoughts and healthy plans. I can't help but worry that it will be impossible to separate them, untangle them enough to destroy the sinfully destructive desires and leave behind the healthy habits.

God's Word is a precision instrument: **"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."** (Hebrews 4:12) It gets at your psychological issues. Your thoughts are those passions that captivate your imagination. Your anger or lust or greed grip your heart and create unhealthy fantasies. What would you do if you could do whatever you want? What would it be like if you could get away with following your desires without any consequences? Your attitudes are those intentions that shape your plans.

Medical technology has improved in such huge leaps in recent years, sometimes we forget not too long ago surgery was a very different experience. Saws went to work on infected body parts and dealing with pain meant biting down on a bullet. God's Word is a scalpel with laser-like precision. You are not some medical experiment, but God's own child. God knows you: **"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 4:13) God knows you as your Creator. God has remarkable vision better than any MRI. And not only does God know you intimately, better than you know yourself, God wants the very best for you. God wants to get at your heart so he can address your unhealthy desires entangling your heart. He sees what needs to be done to kill, revive and heal. Because of his great love and mercy for you, God wants you to go under the knife.

In the very beginning God simply spoke and he brought creation into existence. And then: **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14) Jesus the very Word of God who became human at his birth. Yet Jesus knew the power of the Word in his life. Jesus knew his place was hearing and learning God's Word. That's why we find him as a 12 year old boy discussing Scripture in the temple (Luke 2:41-52). That's why Jesus defended himself against Satan's attacks with Scripture and fought back with the powerful Word of God.

And yet the Word, Jesus, wasn't immune to pain and suffering. On the cross Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for everything you want to ignore, all the sin growing inside you wish could just go away. The cross of Christ was the blunt instrument of execution for the only person in all of history with a completely pure and innocent heart. He cried out in real pain and anguish. On the cross Jesus, the Word, offered himself to be your soul transplant. Every blemish and blockage standing between you and God removed with laser-like precision. Every tumor you left unaddressed extracted by God's gracious scalpel. Going under the knife makes you righteous, healthy, whole.

Debates about health care in this country are extremely emotional. That's because it's not really just about policies, politics or practices. It's about care. For people. It's about our bodies and our lives and the lives of people who depend on us. So it's only natural it would be an emotional debate.

When God gives you his Word, his one goal is your care. God's Word will work to expose sin and imperfections. God's Word may cause bleeding and leave scars. But God's Word that creates life, brings souls to life. That Word brings healing. It sounds painful when we learn:

**“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 4:13) God’s close attention opens you up for his compassion. God knows your needs and how to bring deliverance. The Word of God opens you up to give you the perfect heart of Jesus.

Going under the knife still sounds intimidating. It always involves risks. But sometimes surgery can be worth it. Sometimes it can even make you better than brand new. Tommy John surgery used to be a career killer for baseball players. Now they come back after a year off and sometimes pitch better than they did before. God uses his Word to correct and repair, then give you a new life of faith.

That research that showed distressingly low rates of Bible reading also uncovered some things that led to increased Bible engagement: 1) Confessing wrongdoings to God and asking forgiveness. 2) Believing in Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven. 3) realizing the commitment to the Christian faith may be costly. 4) Praying for the spiritual status of people they know are not professing Christians. When God’s Word works on our hearts we see how important it is. It guides us to Jesus. It gives us a realistic picture of our lives of faith. We see the deep need others have for it.

Did you notice the steps you took to get here this morning? I’m not talking about a fitness tracker you might be wearing. You came from your normal existence into the church building. The entrance is a transition from your world to God’s realm. You enter into God’s presence to hear and learn his Word and are drawn into an architecture that lifts your sights and raises your expectations. The closer you come, the more intimately you receive from God. After receiving God’s gifts for your soul, you are ready to go back into your world. You are in the right place today. You are doing the right thing. And you ten this Word into your life. You have this For at your daily disposal to listen and learn, hear and believe. Go under God’s knife for your rest, your wholeness, your health in God’s Word. Amen.