

Hebrews 4:12-16 Pastor Bill Uetricht 10/14/18 21 Pentecost

Over the past couple of years, since I stopped running and have for some reason more frequently lifted the fork to my mouth, I have put on some weight. So you know what I decided to do? Not get on the scale. That would take care of that. But you know what happened? I went to the doctor, and they put me on the scale. What nerve! I've never like the doctor's office. I think they are in cahoots with the scale companies. It's a matter of collusion.

I've decided that I know how to get my cake and eat it, too. I figured out how to have cake and not be burdened with too many calories. You just eat the icing. You take your finger and rub it along the edge of the cake and then just ingest the icing. Now sometimes when you do that there will be some crumbs that you can collect in a pile or others can collect for you, and you can eat those, too. And the calories that cause weight gain won't be there!

You know this stuff about the warming of the climate? It's a hoax. Asking me to think about what I consume and what we together put into the air and into the streams—that's a tree hugger's deception. Don't go messing with my personal choosing--what I have the right to do or what we together shouldn't be worrying about.

I have this feeling that this past week Mother Nature was taken to the doctor and was put on the scale. That's nervy. She just should have stayed away from the doctor. You know how doctor's offices are. Guess what? I think she has gained weight. Actually, I know she gained lots of weight. Scales, except the ones I get on, tell the truth. She's getting sick from too much weight gain.

The Book of Hebrews today speaks of the word of God, not the Bible, but the communicated message of God, as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow." The word, the author is saying, gets to the bottom of things, is very much alive, cutting things open, revealing the truth. It has the ability to cut through all the junk, cut through all the layers that we pile upon our lives, hoping that these layers will hide the truth. Let's face it. We often don't want others to know the truth. What will they think if they know the

truth? They'll probably reject us. And what's more, what will we think, if we know the truth about ourselves? We'd rather not have the scale tell us that we put on weight. So we avoid the scale.

We drink alone, pouring the alcohol on all the wounds, covering them up. No one needs to know. And if we are doing it alone, we must not have a problem, right? If we in the privacy of our homes in one sitting are eating a half-gallon of ice cream all by ourselves, nobody will find that out, right? And besides, what business is it of theirs? And after all, maybe it wasn't really a half gallon. And if it was, I do that only once in a while. Our eating obsessions, our purging, our anorexia—those are our little secrets. Nobody needs to know. And they really aren't that bad, after all. Nor are the wild and crazy fantasies that we engage in the quiet confines of our computer rooms. They are our little secrets.

So are the depths of our wonderings—our wondering whether God is really real, whether we are truly loved, whether our lives actually have worth. We can't let other people know that stuff. Honestly, sometimes we don't want ourselves to know we struggle with these things. So, give me a drink. Take me to the casino. Let me buy lots of stuff. That will cover up these deep struggles. That will make sure that I don't have to get on the scale.

We all live with secrets, secrets that we even keep from ourselves. The word of God, the message of the faith, though, is living and active. It cuts through all the junk, all the things that we pile upon ourselves to protect ourselves, cover our secrets. "It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" Hebrews says. It lets us know that before God, "no creature is hidden; all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account."

We are known. All the games we play to avoid the truth are revealed as the shams that they are, which is what the opening prayer of our confessional liturgy that we use on occasion says: "Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." No secrets hid! Oh my! What lies we too often live. Maybe if we think they aren't true they won't be true. Maybe if we can run from the overwhelming evidence of the warming of the climate, it won't be true. Maybe if we can pretend as did the audience of Amos that the poor aren't facing injustice,

especially in the legal arena, it won't be true. But God says through the living and piercing word, "I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins." You can run, but you cannot hide.

Whoa! I am feeling overwhelmed, as if I have gotten caught. I have. You have. I wonder if that is what the rich man in our gospel reading was feeling, when, after he asked Jesus to help him discover the good life here and in the world to come, he is told that he lacks one thing: selling what he has and giving money to the poor. Mark tells us that when Jesus told the man this, he was shocked and went away grieving, because "he had many possessions"—lots of land, lots of stuff. He's obviously feeling very overwhelmed. I am not sure, but maybe he's even feeling caught. Money and stuff have been at the center of his life for such a long time. Maybe Jesus' word—an active and piercing word—is cutting through all the junk, revealing some bottom line truth to him.

Ohhhh!!! I am feeling overwhelmed. If this guy, a good guy, a faithful guy, a successful guy--and who doesn't want to be successful—doesn't have the good life, isn't able to run from all the secrets, then who can? It's all sounding kind of hopeless. I'm known. My secrets are out of the box. I'm feeling laid bare. And I don't know about you, but that isn't very comfortable.

You know, it's interesting to note what Mark says about Jesus when he confronts the rich man with the hard stuff. He writes: "Jesus, looking at him, [or maybe better translated, 'seeing through him,'] *loved* him. It's love that pierces the rich man's soul. It's love that lays him bare. It's love that reveals the truth. Let's be honest. It's often our secrets that make us sick. It's often what we hide that keeps us from being healthy.

I don't know about you, but often I find that people who are so zealous in their defense of themselves or their approach to living, so sure of themselves and their perspective on the faith, so certain about how other people ought to live their lives, are too frequently hiding something. They appear big and bossy in order to cover up what is too hard to reveal. The psychologists these days are helping us to see that narcissistic people, people preoccupied with themselves, are often covering up their deep insecurities that they don't want to come to light.

Love wants to bring to light our secrets so that we can get healthier, so that our narcissism doesn't have to be such a burden to ourselves, to other people, to our communities. Seeing right through us, Jesus loves us. And out of that love comes an active, sometimes piercing word, a word that lays us bare before the One to whom we must render an account. It's love that is after us.

The Book of Hebrews, after it speaks of the piercing word of God, tells us that the unveiling of ourselves, the lifting of the secrets, shouldn't overwhelm us because our high priest, as Hebrews calls Christ, who has made it to the top, who has passed through the heavens, has been called the "Son of God" is one who knows what it is like to live in light of real human struggles. You see, Christ can sympathize with our weaknesses, can relate to our attempts to run from the truth because he has been there and done that. He has been tested just like all of us. The only thing different is that Jesus remained faithful. He trusted God in the midst of all of the struggles, all of the challenges of being human.

We can face the reality of our lives, we can stare at our secrets, revealing them to ourselves and others, we can tell the truth because we are accompanied by a true brother, one who seeing through us, still loves us. Yes, you are known. Yes, you have been laid bare. But your secrets are no threat to love. Actually, it's kind of silly to hide. Love already knows you and still loves you. You, therefore, can approach the throne of love with boldness, giving up all the silly games, receiving mercy and finding grace to help in time of need.