

Approaching the Throne of Grace *Hebrews 4:12-16*

God's Word

Today's passage from Hebrews starts by talking about "God's Word." When you hear those words, what comes to mind first? Many of us think of comfort, peace, or maybe wisdom that gives us strength. Some might also recall long, boring speeches like those from a principal at a school assembly. But today's passage paints a different picture. It describes God's Word as sharp and powerful, "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword." It says that it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, exposing the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (v. 12).

This image of a sharp sword may feel unfamiliar when we think of God's Word. The thought of dividing soul and spirit, even joints and marrow, can sound harsh or extreme. But this image also reminds me of a surgical room. It's not just about cutting for the sake of it—it's about healing. Sometimes, to save a life, a surgeon must make a precise cut.

There are moments when a doctor has to use a sharp knife to open up a body and perform life-saving surgery. Last month, I had to undergo wisdom tooth surgery. It's funny that in Korean, we call them "love teeth." Do you know why Koreans call them 'love teeth'? It's because they usually grow around the time when people experience their first love, and the pain of losing them is said to resemble the pain of losing that first love. Wisdom teeth are often hidden beneath the surface. Just because they're unseen doesn't mean they're not a problem. Dentists first have to cut through the gum and bone to reach them. They cut, not to harm, but to heal.

In the same way, the author of Hebrews describes God's Word as a sharp scalpel that cuts through our doubts, excuses, and lies to heal our souls. The Message translation calls God's Word a "surgeon's scalpel." God's Word performs delicate and precise surgery in our hearts. Just as a skilled surgeon uses their tools to open and heal a wound, God's Word opens us up and brings healing to the hidden parts of our lives.

It's not easy to face ourselves

It's not always easy to face ourselves honestly. We can be blind to our own inner struggles or false self. There's a famous story about the Greek philosopher Socrates. Someone once received an oracle that said, "No one is wiser than Socrates." Socrates thought, "That can't be true! I'm not that wise." So, he set out to find wiser people. But after talking with many, he realized that they all thought they knew the truth, but they didn't. And that's when Socrates concluded, "I'm wiser than them because I know that I don't know." And he said, "know thyself!"

Knowing yourself is hard. Sometimes, we don't see our own issues clearly. I once watched a program called *Marriage Hell*, where struggling couples seek counseling. One couple came on the show, and the wife complained that her husband didn't understand her and would lie to avoid conflict. But as the counseling progressed, it became clear that her issues ran deeper. She would get upset over seemingly minor things, like her husband being near another woman at the grocery store. She suspected him of things that weren't happening. By the end of the session, the counselor gently suggested she might need further help, as her suspicions had crossed into delusions. But she still did not agree with the counselor's assessment and solution. It's not easy to face the truth about ourselves.

We all carry wounds, pains, and unmet needs, whether we realize it or not. Our past experiences shape who we are and how we relate to others. Often, our inner struggles affect our relationships and how we see the world without us even realizing it. And in society, we deal with structural sin—things like racism and sexism—that also shape our lives but we don't often realize it.

The author of Hebrews tells us that God's Word cuts through all of this. It opens our hearts to what we might not want to see. God's Word exposes our sins, our selfish desires, and even our deepest wounds. And the only thing we can do is stand honestly before God. In the Bible, "God's Word" refers to Jesus Christ. Through His teachings and His life, the light of God's Word shines on us. It asks us to examine the motivations behind our actions. Are we being truly honest with ourselves? Are we helping others for the right reasons? In Matthew, Jesus teaches us to do good without seeking recognition—"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." But some of us want to make sure that not only our left hand knows, but everyone else knows as well! We have to ask ourselves, "Why am I like this?"

Some people hold themselves—and others—to such high standards that they end up living in constant tension. It's like cleaning a big window: there's just one tiny spot left, but that's all they can focus on. When things don't go exactly as planned, frustration kicks in. This is a moment to pause and ask, "Why do I react this way?"

Let me give you an example. My wife, Juhee, is incredibly compassionate and hard-working. Unlike me, she has a deep sensitivity to other people's needs and works tirelessly to meet them. But sometimes, she overextends herself, pushing beyond what's healthy for her own well-being. In her ordination process, one of her mentors asked her, "Why do you push yourself so hard?" Through prayer and reflection, she came to realize that some of this drive came from childhood. Her parents were often focused on her older brother, who had health problems, so as a child, Juhee felt the need to be "the good daughter" who could help and not add to their burden. Beneath her motivation was a little child who wanted to be loved by her mother. This desire to be loved shaped her to be sensitive to the needs of others and pushed her beyond her limits. But over time, she learned that God was calling her not just to serve others but also to rest in God's love for her. God's Word healed her by revealing the hidden motivations that drove her.

When we come before God's Word honestly, we find healing. God helps us strip away the lies, falsehoods, and defenses we've built up around ourselves. It's only when we allow God's Word to open our hearts that true healing and transformation begin.

Approaching the Throne of Grace

And here's the good news: We don't go through this process alone. The passage from Hebrews today reminds us that we have a great High Priest—Jesus Christ—who has ascended into heaven. The role of a priest is twofold: to represent God to the people and to bring the people's needs before God. Jesus did both perfectly. He showed us God's love through His healing, His compassion, and His care for the poor and the outcast. At the same time, He experienced human suffering, so He knows our pain and stands before God on our behalf. So, we don't approach the throne of grace alone. We have Jesus, our High Priest. Our High Priest knows our weaknesses and walks with us in compassion. How comforting is that? Imagine a new mother about to give birth—whose words would bring her more comfort? A young, unmarried pastor saying, 'Don't worry, it'll be okay,' or an matured woman who has given birth and raised children, offering the same reassurance? Of course, it would be another woman's words. Why is that? Because she also experienced the same anxiety and pain.

In the same way, the Lord came to this earth in human form, experiencing our struggles and weakness firsthand. Jesus understands our weaknesses deeply and has compassion for us. And that Lord is our high priest who speak before God on behalf of us. And even now, the Lord walks beside us. This is comforting and empowering message.

So as we reflect this week, let's take a moment to ask ourselves: What are the things that bind us? What wounds are we carrying? As we come honestly before God, trusting in Christ, may we find healing, renewal, and new life. Let us boldly approach the throne of grace, trusting that Jesus, who knows our every need, walks with us. Amen.