

Christian Education Sunday
September 18, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Hebrews 4:11-15

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living 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. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. (NIV)

On this Christian Education Sunday, as we kick off another year of Sunday School and Bible classes, I want to talk to you about tools. Those who know me pretty well might be chuckling a bit because I am not known to be mister fix it. I don't believe anyone who has seen me try to repair or build or put together something that required more than a screwdriver has walked away calling me a handy man to have around. But if you have been to the parsonage when something needs to be done I don't think it is just my skill set alone that is the problem. I have brought with me today my tool box which contains my entire supply of tools. (show & open) Chances are if something needs to be tightened or fixed or installed or replaced, I will not have the proper tool for the job. Isn't this true of any profession or job? - You can be the best handy man, the most skilled surgeon, the most precise engineer, but if you do not have the proper tools you will not be able to come close to doing your best work.

So today as we begin another year of classes, teaching both the precious lambs and the beloved sheep in this congregation, do we have what we need? Are we prepared and ready to do the job God has given to us? In these words before us we are reminded that the answer is yes. God gives us what we need. May we consider this truth today:
God Gives us the Proper Tools. In His Word. In our Savior.

The writer of Hebrews warns in this chapter of the dangers of disobeying God as did many people before us. Many lost out on the rest God wanted to give them - the rest that comes only through faith. That rest is offered only through the Gospel proclaiming forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus. But why did so many lose out on this rest? Why do so many follow those bad examples and miss out on true spiritual rest today by thinking they can earn God's favor with their works or by just ignoring God and doing whatever they want? God makes this one thing vividly clear - it is not because God hasn't given us the proper tools! *"For the word of God is living 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."*

I don't think we regularly understand and appreciate just what we have in the Word of God! Listen and take in this description for a moment. God's Word is living. It

is alive and always will be because it is indestructible and imperishable. It is also active. The Word is productive - it does things - always. The Word is full of life and energy and never returns to God empty. The sword carried by a Roman soldier was sharp and had a double edge so that it could cut in any direction. But that can't compare to the Word of God - it is sharper than that! It cuts deep - even penetrating things we wouldn't think possible "***dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.***" It can cut not just through skin and bones but even our innermost parts. The Word even judges our very thoughts and attitudes and knows our every intention. The Word will also stand as the final judge on the last day. Jesus once warned: "***There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.***" (John 12).

Those of you who have answered the call to teach our children do you understand what a tool God has given to you? The Word you teach these children is extremely powerful and effective. For all of us do we recognize the opportunities we have to listen to the Word? God speaks to you through His Word. God works in our hearts through His Word. God changes hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, makes the dead alive, and cuts through and does the impossible with His Word. There is no question about it - God gives us the proper tool we need in His Word!

God's Word has two main messages, doesn't it? Here the one message comes across very clear - the message of God's holy law. "***Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***" The words here are difficult to translate exactly but the imagery is graphic and the implications are chilling. The Greek word here had the picture of that of an animal or a criminal offender with their neck literally on the line or on the chopping block. Or the word was also used of that of a wrestler seizing one by the throat leaving his opponent limp and powerless. That's how we are when we try to stand before God on our own. Think about this: God knows your inner thoughts. God watches the sinful actions you commit behind closed doors when no one else is looking. God hears the lies no one else catches. God sees our every secret sin. This is the God to whom we must give account - our necks are on the line.

If you feel comfortable in your seat right now then I haven't done a very good job explaining this passage. If these words don't make each and every one of us uncomfortable I've missed the boat because we should be because we have sinned. We don't deserve anything from God but to be on the chopping block. What kind of account could we give to our Holy, Almighty Maker? The law exposes each of us as sinners. May we never shy away from proclaiming God's law in our classrooms. Even our children need to hear the truth of what God thinks about their sin and what their sin deserves. Even children need to hear God speak to them about how much trouble they would be in on their own.

The law is a very powerful tool God gives to us. It is to be used properly to crush and condemn and convict each and every sinner. It is to be used to hold us all accountable before God. But it is not the only tool God has given to us. What a drear and gloomy church and classes we would have if all we were told and all we taught others was what we should do and not do! How miserable and depressing it would be if we only showed people here their sins! Thankfully we have more because God have

given us another tool, and it is the most powerful tool in all the world. It is the tool that I pray dominates all that Amazing Grace teaches and does. For God has given us a perfect Savior. God has given us the good news - the Gospel that shows us this Savior.

This is what the writer of Hebrews shows us in the next verses. ***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*** Again here we see exactly who Jesus is - the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is true man and yet true God. Just as important as knowing who Jesus is knowing what Jesus has done. He is our great high priest. As our great high priest Jesus does not just go behind some great big curtain to talk to God for us - He ***“has gone through the heavens.”*** Jesus sits at God’s right hand interceding for us. But much more than that. Jesus obeyed for us. God looked and watched and witnessed everything Jesus did here on earth and all He saw was perfect obedience. Yes Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but He was without sin.

And as our great high priest Jesus did not take animals and sacrifice them to God daily on our behalf. Instead, Jesus offered the once for all sacrifice for sin. Jesus took our necks off of the line and put His own head on the chopping block. On the cross Jesus shed His innocent blood and gave up His perfect life for sinners - sinners like you and me. The best news is our great high priest still lives to tell of the victory He won for us on that cross. He lives to intercede for us each day. No matter what our problem, no matter what needs fixing, no matter how damaged or in need of repair our lives get at times, we have the proper tool for it all - Jesus. Jesus is the solution for it all - the most important and really the only tool we need not just for life, but for eternal life. In our classes, in our homes, and in our lives, I pray we are constantly using this tool - turning to, relying on, and trusting in our Savior.

We have the proper tools, don’t we? God has given us all we need in Jesus. It is my prayer this year that we strive to use all the gifts God the Father has given to us to proclaim all the truths of what Jesus has done for us all the while trusting all the results to the Holy Spirit. If we do this then both God’s lambs and His sheep in this congregation will be well fed and by God’s grace it will be a job done well. It is certainly nice for a change not to be missing any tools for the job. Thank you God. Thank you Jesus. Amen.