

Wednesday in Lent I
LTS Chapel

8 March 2017
Pretoria, South Africa

Psalm: Ps. 143

Hymn: "On My Heart Imprint Your Image"-422 LSB

Hebrews 4:12-16

Sanctify us in the Truth, Your Word is Truth! Amen.

Our God is no silent deity who sits in isolation, unapproached and unapproachable. The God who created the heavens and the earth is a speaking God. In the beginning, He called the universe into existence by His mighty Word. He said "Let there be light" and the light did shine in the darkness. He spoke by the prophets we confess in the Nicene Creed. Or as the Book of Hebrews puts it "In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets, but now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son." God's Son, the very Word made flesh was not wordless. His words are spirit and they are life. His words have created faith in your heart for faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. That is a miracle, Luther reminds us, on the level of creation itself for when God brought you to faith, He was causing the light of the Gospel to shine into your darkened hearts.

We speak of this as the efficacy of God's Word. It says what it does and does what it says. God's Word is not merely descriptive of who God is or what He does. God's Word carries the power of God Himself. It is as our text says sharper than a double-bladed sword. God's Word lays the heart bare. No secrets of mind or impulses of the soul are concealed before our Creator. We may succeed in hiding our sins from our neighbors. You may even have some success in suppressing the truth of your sin from your own consciousness. But you are never able to hide your heart from the gaze of a God who sees all and knows all.

This God is not silent. As we heard from Psalm 51 last week. He is justified in His words and blameless in His judgments (Ps. 51:4). It is to Him that we must give account. So we come today to confess our sins, that is to say "yes and amen" to God's judgment. Standing before His Word, no excuses are sufficient. No rationalizations will prevail. We can only confess, "Against You and You only have I sinned done what is evil in Your sight."

The God whose Law uncovers, exposes and condemns our sin does not leave us in silence to suffer with the knowledge that we have sin against Him in thought, word, and deed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed "he who is alone with his sin is utterly alone." Jesus did not leave us alone with our sin. He came to us as our Brother. In Him we have a great high priest. Jesus the Son of God is the one mediator between God and man. He is a high priest who shares our humanity. He is able to sympathize with us in our weakness for He was tempted as we are tempted. He endured the forty days and nights in the wilderness where He was attacked by Satan. He was tempted again on Good Friday as he hung on the cross and mocked by those who shouted at Him "If you are the Son of God save yourself." This high priest, faithful to the word and will of His Father would not save Himself for that would mean losing you. Satan could not divorce our high priest from His cross.

This Jesus is my Lord. He has redeemed me not with gold or silver but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom to

paraphrase words of the Catechism. That is the confession to which we hold fast in the face of our own terrified consciences, the accusation of the Law, and the assaults of the evil one. In a few minutes you will kneel before the altar and you will hear the words of Christ from the lips of His servant: "Your sins are forgiven you." To those words you will say, Amen! That is your confession. Jesus says of you, I have atoned for your sins. I am your High Priest. Your sin though is forgiven. Now you confess, "My sin is forgiven for Jesus' sake." Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless