

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

## GOING UNDER THE KNIFE

Hebrews 4:12-13; Warren Tabatt Funeral; June 3, 2024

As we age, our bodies weaken and are more prone to injuries and illnesses. Our bodies wear out and we have to see doctors and other health care providers. One of the blessings of modern medicine is that there are many therapies and surgeries that are now available to repair our broken and injured bodies. Joints that are worn out or damaged can be replaced. Like many others his age, Warren “went under the knife” of the surgeon to replace and repair what was broken.

As is the case with some surgeries, no matter how careful we are – sterilization of operating rooms, surgical tools, and staff; antibiotics taken as a preventative measure; keeping the wound clean and covered until healed – there are some nasty “bugs” that wreak havoc with our bodies when they have been “gone under the knife.” Warren got one of those nasty bugs, and it was more serious than the condition he had surgery for in the first place. Several rounds of treatment failed to heal him of his infection. The frustrating thing was that the treatment that he was finally given – after a battle to get it paid for since it was very expensive – worked. When there is a treatment that is known to be effective and the ones that have been prescribed have not worked, why should we keep going back to what failed?

I’m sure that Warren was thankful when finally given a treatment that healed him of his infection so he could get back to living, not just existing. The ongoing care that Cheryl gave him through that time was crucial to the good outcome. Yet, in this cruel world these victories are only temporary. We might recover from one thing, but the next thing is sure to pop up, as it did with Warren, and as it will surely do with all of us. All the medicines and therapies in the world can’t save us from death. Going under the knife to repair one thing could very well lead to other complications or death.

The good news for today is that God is a surgeon, and His scalpel works in a way that accomplishes lasting good in both our bodies and souls. When we go under the knife with God operating, we don’t have to wonder if He’s doing the right thing for us.

What do I mean? The primary text for today's sermon is from Hebrews chapter four, where God's Word is described as a sharp sword exposing what is wrong with us and working to repair what is broken. Hear these words again: **For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**

God's Word functions like a surgeon's scalpel, cutting into us as in an exploratory surgery to discover what's wrong with us. God's Word cuts deep into us and **discerns the thoughts and intentions of our hearts**. The writer notes that nothing in us is hidden from God, and if that makes you uncomfortable, you should be. The writer compares being exposed by God's Word to standing naked in front of someone, unable to hide our shame.

You might be asking yourself at this point: Where is the good news in this? If God's Word cuts to the heart and finds there our sinful thoughts and intentions – as He is sure to since we are all sinners – what good does that do for us? God's Word of law diagnoses our ailment, sin, but gives us only one prognosis: death. God's Word of law functions like a surgeon doing exploratory surgery, opening us up and finding us riddled with cancer and then closes us up to tell us, "The cancer has spread everywhere. I can't do anything to help you at this point. You're going to die from this." The cancer of sin has metastasized throughout our bodies and souls and there is nothing we can do to change that.

We are here today for Warren's funeral. The reality is that one day it will be ours; we will be laid out neatly in a casket with our friends and family surrounding us, and we will be dead. The sharp knife of God's Word of law gets to the root cause of our troubles, our sin, and the prognosis is death. The law cannot heal us.

The good news is that God's Word is a **two-edged sword**. The one edge cuts in the direction of the law, but the other cuts in the direction of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. If our cancer is sin, we need the cure for sin, and that is in Jesus alone.

**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.** The holy Son of God came into this world as a man to save us from sin and death. That the Father **gave** His Son is a reference to Jesus going to the cross to suffer for our sins, die, and then rise victorious over them.

If the thoughts and intentions of our hearts are sinful – and they are – then we need new hearts and intentions. We often pray in church, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within in.”** The way God does this is through Jesus. God sees our problem and His law has diagnosed it as terminal, but He does not want us to perish in our sins, but live. So Jesus came into this sinful and dying world to do something about this for us. God’s Son became true Man to take on everything that ails us and He overcame it for us. Hebrews four states: **For we do not have a high priest [Jesus] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.** Even though Jesus had no sin in Him, He “went under the knife” for our sin.

You probably remember the account from John’s Gospel about how, after Jesus had died on the cross, the soldier took his spear – basically a sharp knife on a wooden staff – and pierced Jesus’ side, and out came blood and water. By the blood of Jesus, we are cleansed of our sins and cured of death. By the water of Holy Baptism, we are raised from the death of sin we inherited from our parents and made children of God through faith in Jesus to not perish but have eternal life.

Warren often read God’s Word from his Bibles – he had a number of Bibles scattered around the house so he had access to one wherever he was. He liked to read God’s Word and then pray based on that Word. **The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.** God’s Word worked like a surgeon’s scalpel, not to introduce infection in Warren, but to find it and cut it out so he could be healed.

I don't know anyone who enjoys "going under the knife," but Warren's example of undergoing the two-edged sword of God's Word, both of law and gospel, for what ailed him is something all of us should take to heart. His sins were exposed for what they were, but more than that, his Savior from that sin was exposed and the life eternal that comes from Jesus was also revealed. In his time of need, Warren knew where to turn for help: the Great Physician of body and soul. This is just what we need in our lives. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** Amen.