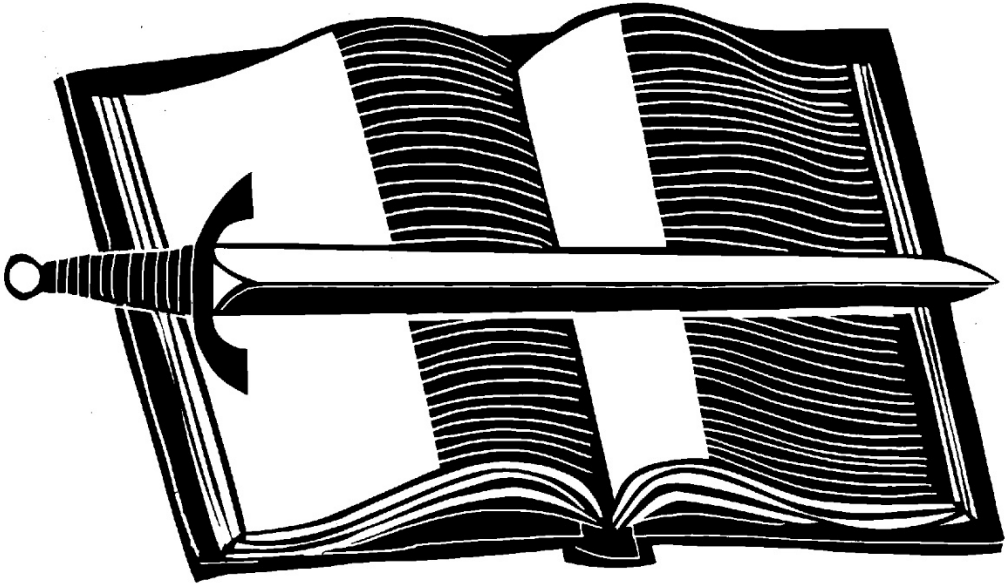


Sword Drill

The Rev. Ryan Wiksell



October 13, 2024

The Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

- In my Newsletter I described a popular activity in Sunday School growing up:
 - Sword drills!
 - If you're imagining they gave us plastic swords and taught us how to fence or something...
 - That would have been way more fun
 - In reality it was just learning how to find Bible verses quickly
- Because... the "Word of God is living and active, sharper than a *two-edged sword*"
 - Our Hebrews reading has it right there. On the face of it, we were taught to believe that the Bible is a weapon.
 - And we behaved accordingly. We learned it so that we would have the edge over the enemy... an instrument of victory right there in our backpacks.
- But there's two issues with that.
 - Although many Christians call the Bible the "Word of God" today, the author of Hebrews definitely didn't.
 - Partly because the New Testament wouldn't be officially formed for a few more centuries, so the book we call the Bible didn't exist yet.
 - And partly because that word "Word" or *Logos* in Greek, had a much deeper meaning than letters on a page.

- Recall the way John uses it in his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word”, or the Logos, meaning, Jesus.
- I don’t think Hebrews is simply referring to Jesus here, as if “Jesus is sharper than a two-edged sword”
- But we might get closer if we look at the mission of Jesus, the purpose of Jesus...
- When Jesus became human, the Word of God came down
- And the Word of God grew up, and proceeded to say some really difficult things
 - Such as “I came not to bring peace, but a sword”
- So how do we process stuff like this?
 - Is Jesus violent? Is he promoting violence?
 - Is the author of Hebrews promoting violence?
 - We tend to think so, because “sword” has become a symbol of violence, and little else.
- What’s a different way we could look at this image of a two-edged sword?
 - Perhaps not as a destroyer, but as a creator?
 - There is a precedent for this, and it’s one that might have even existed in the minds of Jesus and the author of Hebrews
- The Greeks had an especially ancient myth, called the Pelasgian creation myth
 - Long story short, the matter of the universe was pre-existent, but it was chaotic and undefined

- And then a sword rushed in and divided the heavy stuff from the light stuff. The heavy stuff sank and became water and earth. The light stuff floated and became fire and air
- And the sword, known as the Great Cutter, came again, and divided salt water from fresh water, mainland from island and so on and so on
- Pythagoras even added that the Great Cutter was responsible for the distinctions between light and dark, left and right, male and female
- And all these distinctions are what make our creation beautiful and good
- Because we have distinction, we can also have Love
 - If there are no differences, there is no relationship
 - The Pelasgians presumed that this Great Cutter is responsible for Love itself
 - And I think our own Creation story would align with that.
 - It's full of divisions and distinctions and discriminations
 - And it's these things that make relationship possible
- Let's look at that first verse in Hebrews again: "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword."
 - When the Word comes, when the *Logos* comes, distinction comes with it. life comes with it. Activity comes with it. Love comes with it.
- The trouble is, we haven't embraced these distinctions
 - We have chosen, by and large, not to love

- And we've clamored for tribal belonging, based on ego, which rejects people, places and things for their differences.
 - And we've insisted on winning. On being first.
 - And in the process, we've rejected Love
- So Jesus steps in to show us the way home
 - When he says that the first will be last and the last will be first
 - He collapses that dichotomy that's been controlling us and enslaving us
 - So that "first" and "last" have no meaning.
- Does that mean we're all supposed to be the same?
Indistinguishable for each other?
 - No! But it means that Jesus is giving us the tools to reject the discriminations of the ego
 - And return to the distinctions brought by that living, active sword
 - So that we can see and feel and experience all the goodness and beauty and astonishing variety that first brought us into being.
- Amen.

The Pelasgian Creation Myth

We know that more than one American man today needs a sword to cut his adult soul away from his mother-bound soul. Australian aboriginal initiators use that sword precisely to cut that psychic umbilical cord. The sword has the edge that cuts clinging away from love, cuts boyish bravado away from manly firmness, and cuts passive-aggression away from fierceness. The Tibetans refer to such a sharp interior sword as “the Vajra sword.” Without it, they say, no spiritual life is possible, and no adult life.

We also may need a sword to cut us apart from our own self-pity. Victimhood may have been inattentively joined to us when we were children, in a joining we could not prevent, achieved in a trance by a molester, a brutalizing brother or sister, a violent father or violent mother. The victim’s soul becomes bound in a Siamese-twin fashion to self-pity, resentment, depression, low self-esteem, passivity and rage. Who is going to cut those emotions away from the soul?

The Greeks admired a Pelasgian creation myth, which was different from and older than the Olympian creation myth. The myth says that once upon a time there was an egg floating on the ocean. Then a sword began to move toward the egg, and the sword cut the egg in two. It turned out that Eros was inside the egg.

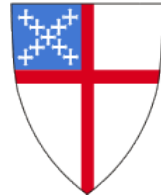
If the egg had remained as it was, there would have been no Eros in the world. No sword, no Eros, the myth says. The parent’s love for the

child, the man's love for a woman, the woman's love for a man, the bee's love for the hive, the worshipper's love for God—none of that comes into being without the sword.

Such a history of creation is a history of discriminations. Once matter appeared, the Great Cutter arrived and divided matter into heavy stuff and light stuff. The light rose and the heavy sank. Then the Divine Cutter appeared once more, and divided the light stuff so that one part became Fire and one part Air. Then the Divine Cutter divided the heavy matter so that one part became Earth and one part became Water. Then the Divine Cutter, or *Logos*, divided earth so that one part became mainland, and one part island. The sword once more divided water into salt water and fresh water. The sword kept on dividing and dividing. These cuttings resulted at last in the finely articulated, singing, beautifully detailed, shining world of minute particulars that the landscape painters love. Why should we be afraid of cuttings? We can feel how different this story is from “And God created Heaven and Earth.”

Pythagoras added that the Divine Cutter was also responsible for right/left, straight/crooked, male/female, limited/unlimited, moving/resting, etc.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to October 12



Proper 23
Year B
RCL

Track 1 or *Track 2*

Job 23:1-9, 16-17	Amos 5:6-7,10-15
Psalms 22:1-15	Psalms 90:12-17
Hebrews 4:12-16	Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31	Mark 10:17-31

The Collect

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Job said:

"Today also my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.
Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
I would lay my case before him,
and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would learn what he would answer me,
and understand what he would say to me.

Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?

No; but he would give heed to me.

There an upright person could reason with him,
and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

"If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;

on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.

God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;

If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face!"

The Psalm

Psalm 22:1-15

Deus, Deus meus

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? *
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?

2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; *
by night as well, but I find no rest.

3 Yet you are the Holy One, *
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

4 Our forefathers put their trust in you; *
they trusted, and you delivered them.

5 They cried out to you and were delivered; *
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.

6 But as for me, I am a worm and no man, *
scorned by all and despised by the people.

- 7 All who see me laugh me to scorn; *
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,
- 8 "He trusted in the LORD; let him deliver him; *
let him rescue him, if he delights in him."
- 9 Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, *
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.
- 10 I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born; *
you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb.
- 11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near, *
and there is none to help.
- 12 Many young bulls encircle me; *
strong bulls of Bashan surround me.
- 13 They open wide their jaws at me, *
like a ravening and a roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water;
all my bones are out of joint; *
my heart within my breast is melting wax.
- 15 My mouth is dried out like a pot-sherd;
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; *
and you have laid me in the dust of the grave.

The Epistle

Hebrews 4:12-16

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have

one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The Gospel

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me **good**? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, **sell what you own**, and give the money to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven**; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. **But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.**”