

**SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY SEXAGESIMAE**  
(Cape Town - 7 February 2010)

**Text:** <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. (Hebrew 4:12-13)

I would like to ask the older generation whether you still remember what the price of petrol was when you started driving? We know what it is today, nearly R8 a litre. When I started driving way back in 1976 a litre of petrol cost less than 50 cents. I was in the army then and drove a motorbike, which I bought for a R100. The tank took 7.5 litres of petrol. It cost approximately R3.50 to fill the tank and the tank lasted me for almost the whole month. But if you consider inflation, today's petrol price is about the same as it was in 1976.

Today we can hardly do without petrol. We need it to fill-up our vehicles. And the more we drive, the more petrol we need. Every vehicle needs some source of energy to keep it going. Today it is still petrol. In the near future it may be changing to electricity. A few years ago the thought of driving on electricity was a very attractive prospect. Today, however, with the ever increasing cost of electricity, I am not so sure anymore. But whatever we use to keep our "wheels" turning, we need some source of energy.

Even our human body needs energy. This is the reason why we eat, not only once a day but three times a day. If you didn't eat a good breakfast in the early morning you will notice by early afternoon that your body is crying out for food. Last week we also talked about "exercising" our body, which is important not only for the heart or the lungs but also our mental health. Our body needs fuel, food and exercise, otherwise it degenerates much faster than we want.

But what about our soul? What about our inner-body? Does it need fuel as well? This is something we don't always think about. We tend to focus so much on our outer-body. Every magazine has got lists of exercises and diets you need to follow to look slim and beautiful.

The author of this letter to the Hebrews shifts our focus. Just for once forget your outer-body. You have a soul as well. You have an inner-body, which we can call our "spiritual body". And looking after *this* body and creating a balance between this body and your outer-body, both given to you by God, is so important.

Both psychologists and psychiatrists have shown that it is quite detrimental even for our physical health if we neglect our spiritual health. If we aren't healthy "inside" - yes, we may be fit, but we will never find contentment and peace.

In the first chapters of this letter to the Hebrews the word "peace" doesn't feature. But the word used frequently by the author is the word "rest". He says from the creation of mankind, God had promised his people a rest. This rest is not "inactivity". I for one cannot rest when I am inactive. But "rest" refers to this great *relationship* that Adam and Eve had with God, a relationship of friendship and total trust. That is "rest".

I can imagine, that is the kind of relationship that you are looking for as well. Just imagine a life where you work hard, you are creative and productive, but you don't have worries. And the reason why you don't have worries, is because you live in the constant realisation of having a heavenly Father who cares for you and whom you totally trust. That is what the word "rest" means. And that is what God planned when he created us.

Through sin Adam and Eve lost the "rest". But God renewed his promise to the Israelites in Egypt. He said to them: "I am going to lead you to a new land, where milk and honey flows. It is a land which you haven't build. The cities are already there. The vineyards are there. The orchards are there. There you will find *rest*." But the first generation of Israelites never reached that promised land. Why not? Because they always turned away from God. When Moses was on the mountain with God and he stayed away longer than expected, they build a golden calf and worshipped it. When God gave them manna to eat in the desert and said: "Don't gather on the Sabbath day, I will provide", they didn't obey. There was no trust. As a result they never found the "rest", the "inner peace" that God had promised them.

But God wants this inner peace for you. He says: One day it will be perfected in heaven! But you can share in it *now already*. Especially the New Testament is full of wonderful promises God made through Jesus. Jesus himself says in Matthew 11: "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" (v.28). In 1 Peter 5:7 we read: "***Cast all your anxiety on him [God] because he cares for you.***" But somehow this "peace" is illusive. And do you know why it is illusive? It is illusive because we do not allow the "Word of God" to do its work.

We get up early in the morning and exercise (which is good for our body). We work concentrated and for long hours each day to enrich ourselves and to provide for the family

(which is good). But it is *not* good when that becomes our trust. And it is *not* good when it is done at a cost of our spiritual body.

This is where our sermon text sets in. If we want the “rest” that God has promised us, we should allow the Word of God to do its work. There is so much power in the God’s Word, if we just open ourselves up to it.

We read: ***“The Word of God is living and active”*** (v.12a). The word “active” in Greek is ενεργης (energys). That is where our English word “energy” comes from. That is exactly what happens when you make time to read God’s Word, reflect on it, and most importantly also “obey” it. It energises you. It energises you from the inside. We waste so much energy by worrying and focussing on worldly things. It is an age old problem. Even Jesus’ followers battled with it. That is why he said to them: ***“Do not worry? Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than cloths... Seek first the kingdom of God ... and all these things will be given to you as well. O you people of little faith”*** (cf Mt.6:25ff). Where there is faith in God and his Word, we are energised. That is what the Word does. In fact, it creates this faith.

The apostle continues: ***“[The Word of God is] sharper than any double-edged sword”*** (v.12b). This is great a image to explain the effectiveness of God’s Word. In the first century the Roman soldiers all carried a sharp sword, which was edged on both sides to cut in any direction. But the “Word of God” is even sharper and even more versatile. The apostle writes, it divides even ***“soul and spirit, joints and marrow”*** (v.12c). It divides where we can’t even see.

Who of us can work out where “soul” and “spirit” touch or divide? No-one has, and no-one will. But that is where the Word of God cuts - deep down where nobody can see.

From a Lutheran perspective, the sword does its doubled edged work in the form of “Law” and “Gospel”. Sometimes the Word is Law. Like a deadly dagger it cuts through the veneer of self-righteousness and exposes our sin. This is not fun. And people mustn’t believe that church is only about having “fun”. Of course, there is fun. But God’s primary work is to heal our souls. And for this purpose he must first address what is wrong. He must address what holds our lives capture and draws us away from him and his promised “rest”.

The apostles writes: The Word of God ***“... judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the***

**heart**” (v.12d). This means, If we are selfish, the Word exposes it. If we are unforgiving, the Word reveals it. If we just want to “lord” it over others, instead of serving, the Word uncovers it.

But once the “wound” has been opened the Word of God cuts in the other direction. That is the “Gospel”. It reveals God’s grace and mercy in Christ. It shows us how loving God is. It shows how eager he is to forgive our sins. It shows us how caring he is and that we don’t have to worry. He cares for us. That is his promise.

We live in a time when more people have cancer than before. If you have cancer you need radiation treatment or chemotherapy. Those who received this treatment will tell you, it is not fun. And I have heard doctors use the phrase: “In order to cure you, we almost have to kill you.” God does it with his Word. He exposes, he cuts deep. But he has only one goal and that is “healing”.

Allow him to cut. Allow the Word of God to do its work in your life. Don’t run away.

The apostle concludes by saying: “***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight***” (v.13a). That is a “comforting thought.” It means, if something is poisoning my life, God will find it. And I want him to find it. That is why I read his Word. That is what I listen to his message. In difficult times, when God’s Word seems lifeless or ineffective, I persevere in my faith. I trust that he will do his work.

God has planed a “rest” for you. In the past many people never found this rest. But if you hear his voice speaking to you “today”, open you heart. Amen.