

2018-10-14 ... 10am Service ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

Hebrews 4: 12 – 16; Mark 10: 17 – 31

**'High Priest and Two Edged Sword'**

**Introduction ...**

**'Good Cop ... Bad Cop'**

I'm sure you know the theory.

Two different approaches to a suspect ... which will get the person to say more, or to open up:

**The Good Cop** – who oozes supposed sympathy ...

**The Bad Cop** – who threatens in one way or another ...

I start with that illustration because all 3 of our Bible readings could be said to have elements of God operating in both modes – though in Amos – the threats are more apparent!

I'd like us first to focus on Hebrews ...

**Two contrasting paragraphs ...**

At first glance, we have two contrasting paragraphs in those few verses from **Hebrews 4:**

**'The Word of God – sharper than a 2 edged sword ... piercing ... laying bare ...'**

... this could remind us of the **'bad cop'** approach: we could feel it to be threatening ... and jump quickly to the second paragraph ... Jesus as the **'High Priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses ... one who can be approached in time of need.'** The **'good cop'**.

But I don't think we need to separate them in this kind of way.

If we take the last phrase as underpinning the whole ... we need both **the 2 edged sword and the sympathetic High Priest.**

The aim of God here is: **'that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'**

Think of the **2 edged sword** along the lines of a surgeon's scalpel. Back in the days before effective anaesthetics, patients certainly wanted a sharp surgical instrument – and even today, the preference remains – a sharp scalpel does much less damage to tissue than a blunt one.

So the **2 edged sword** carries the sense of exposing what needs to be changed, cut out, stopped.

**Application ...**

And this might be in our own lives ... what habits or attitudes or responses have we developed that are destructive: destructive in their effect on others ... or on ourselves?

The Word of God can expose these ... for the young man in the Gospel reading it was his love of possessions ... Jesus exposed this. For us ... Jesus can still act in this way ... if we prayerfully allow verses from the Bible to be applied to us through the work of the Holy Spirit ... and we dare to do this because we know that Jesus loves us, sympathises with us and **'wants to give us grace to help in time of need.'**

But the **2 edged sword** and its action is not limited to individuals ... there are times when God speaks clearly about the issues of our society through his written word.

Think back to the words of Amos that we heard earlier:

**PTO**

Criticism of **trampling on the poor** -

what might God want to say to us about the housing situation of many in our country ...

Criticism of **taking bribes** –

we know how poisonous that can be – whether in the police or prison service ...

in contracts handed out ...

in sport ...

Such things need to be exposed, brought out into the open ... not primarily to punish those who are wrong-doers ... though justice may require this ... but more to stop the perpetration of evil and the harm done to the vulnerable.

As expressed by Amos:

**'Hate evil and love good  
and establish justice.**

**Conclusion ...**

So when we read those 2 paragraphs from Hebrews – they are not opposed to each other ... not **'Good Cop' / 'Bad Cop'** in that sense ... they do go together.

They remind us that sometimes to expose what is really going on – in our own lives or in our society ... is necessary, is prerequisite to God being able to **'give us grace to help us in times of need'** but also – that we can trust his good intent and his company along the way:

**a High Priest who sympathises with our weaknesses  
and who wants to show us mercy.**