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"Cut to the Heart" The Rev. Garrett Lane (10/13/2024, The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost)

Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your

sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Amen.

If you're a fan of any style of romantic comedy, whether early 2000s, 90s, maybe further

back, those are my favorite areas, so I'm going to talk about those.

You know the plots, many of these plots have something that have to do with the power of

a hidden identity, power of a hidden identity.

Some of us, someone wants to get to know someone, someone disguises who they are or unexpectedly

fall into a position where someone thinks they're someone else and a budding romance

ensues and something happens.

There's two of these movies that I really like that I'll mention right now.

Maybe you've seen Mrs. Doubtfire in 1993, yes, good, thank you, I'm getting some nods.

Robin Williams disguises himself as a wacky, wacky plot as an elderly British nanny to spend

time with his kids after a recent divorce and it goes, all things considered pretty well.

It's one of my, I really like this film or maybe you've seen how to lose a guy in 10 days,

another one of my favorites, a young Matthew McConaughey, Kate Hudson, McConaughey before

he's on the whiskey commercials, like before he was kind of thought of as this gentleman, rather.

But Matthew McConaughey, regardless, she's trying to drive a man away and he's made

a bet that he can get someone to love him in 10 days or date him, fall in love with him

for a bet and what could possibly go wrong.
It's a great movie, I really like it.
But this identities in both, Robin Williams hiding his identity
dressing up as a nanny every
day to see his children and Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey hiding
their own identities
and characters in the film as they're trying to do something with one
another.
And at some point in all of these plots, at some point in all of these
movies, something
happens and there's a realization of who someone really is.
These movies connect with us, I think, because we are so often trying
to figure out if who
we're talking to is the person that they say they are and they're
trying to figure out
if who they're talking to us, we are the people that we say we are.
We are wanting to know people around us and we are wanting to be
known.
There are times when we don't want to be known, though, where we don't
want to be seen.
Perhaps if you are binging love island at full volume and your
neighbor can, yeah, maybe
not then, maybe not when you go to the fridge for your little sweet
treat at night and you
end up eating like half a gallon of ice cream.
Maybe you've been there, maybe not.
Sounds like you haven't been there.
So I'll confess that when we get there in the service.
Maybe when you realize that little piece of spinach has been on your
front teeth for
five hours and no one said anything, you don't want to be seen then.
But we do want to be known.
We do want to know others as well.
We live for these moments where this tension is released when the
masks come off, when
the identities are resolved, and when we know who we're talking to.
We want to be known.
We want to be seen.
We want to have a genuine connection with other people.
If you've fallen in love, if you've been a part of a long-standing
community theater group
where if you've watched football in the same place at Chili's for a
couple of weeks in
a row, you'll start to realize these communities pop up and show up
and we're drawn to them.
Maybe it's why you're here today.
Maybe you feel seen here and taken care of here.
And you know someone else that's here today.
We also want to know God.
It's something that shows up in all of our readings.

Nearly you could make the argument every Sunday, the writers of the Bible, these people that are putting pen to parchment, to paper, to all of the things, they are wanting to know God too. It is in the Old Testament, it is in the New Testament. Who is this God? What does God want with us and can I trust what this God is saying? These are the questions that get repeated in so many different ways. And one of those ways that it gets repeated and comes up is today in our Hebrews reading, in the letter to the Hebrews. Calling this book a letter is a bit of a stretch. It's more of a sermon. You can think of it as a sermon, but I'll keep calling it a letter. This is just my own little nitpickiness about some of these misnomers that show up. Think of it more as a sermon. This letter of Hebrews is called the letter to the Hebrews for its content more than anything else. The writer is so familiar with the Hebrew Bible. Is so familiar with the Hebrew Bible translated in Degree, which we call this Septuagint, but he is so interested in these callbacks in connecting who this God is after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the God that is in the Hebrew Bible, like these are things that the author of Hebrews cares about is making that connection. The people that are reading this sermon, this letter, are likely familiar with the text too. They're probably Jewish or have been at some point and are starting to follow Jesus, but all of them know Greek as well. The author of the Hebrew picks up on this concept that is up or throughout the Old Testament. He starts talking about the word of God. Maybe you've heard the word of God before in some contexts. You hear at the end of our readings the word of the Lord, which is a similar phrasing. The word of the Lord, thanks be to God, it's something that comes up again and again. Not just here, but in our Bibles as well. There's this deep, deep well in the biblical tradition that talks about the word of the Lord in the prophets, in the Old Testament, Amos, in kings, in Micah, Joel, Micah, Joel, and Isaiah. I'll start within the first chapter talking about the word of the

Lord, and it shows up
in the New Testament as well.
Most famously, you probably know in the Gospel of John, chapter 1, in
the beginning was
the word, and the word was with God, and the word was with God.
This phrase sits at the center of this reading that we have from
Hebrews, the word of God.
And I'm still in the first verse of our reading.
So don't worry, we'll shorten it up, don't worry, but if you're
worried about that.
This word of God is equated with God's speech, and the person of God,
who God is, you know,
what I was talking about, how we want to get to know God, who God says
God is, and who
God is, for the writer of Hebrews and in other parts of the Bible, are
not two separate
things, but the same thing, you know, God, because God has said things
to us.
The word of God is equated with life, and it is associated with who
God is, life and
light. Life and light is living and active in verse 12.
It says, it is sharper than to any two-edged sword.
Is the sharpest sword piercing until it divides soul from spirit,
joints from marrow, and
is able to judge the thoughts of intentions of the heart.
This word is alive, it is active, it is sharp, and it cuts into
interior places, cutting
into the parts of us that we keep hidden.
Word of God, the word of the Lord, and then Jesus, who is the word of
God.
This writer and so many writers lean into this ambiguity, are we
talking about a word
here?
Are we talking about Jesus?
Many scholars debate these things, and I don't want to today, so I'm
not going to.
But here's how I'm reading it.
The writer of Hebrews knows who Jesus is, he's about to talk about
Jesus as a great high
priest.
When he talks about this word that is a sword that cuts us to the
heart, it is not cutting
us in a way to hurt us.
It is cutting us in a way to open us up and to acknowledge the fact
that we, the thing
that we already know, but we pretend we don't know, is that God knows
intricately who
we are.
God knows all of the things about me and about you, and when we come
into this place and

when we gather here, you, we think about that, or we try to not think about it.

Verse 13 says, 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.

There's a reading here that can be read more as lifting up your throat to someone else.

That's kind of the idea.

We are standing before God and we are in front of him, laid bare in front of God.

And it sounds ominous, it sounds really scary at this point in the reading.

What is this God going to do?

To whom we must render an account, sounds a little heavy.

But then the author says, Jesus, this great high priest knows who we are and knows our

weaknesses, knowing them in the way that he knows our hearts.

This sharp sword word of God and knowing them in how Jesus Christ who lived as a human

died as a human as well and has all of the decisions that we have, but makes the right

ones, i.e. trusting God.

There is life in the interior, what is laid bare before the Creator, what is laid bare

before the Creator is ourselves.

We have this prayer that you heard me pray at the very beginning of service and want

to read it again to you.

It is the call for purity, it is at the front of your bulletin and it says this, Almighty

God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hid.

I think in general I am catching myself up with where I am at the service and I just kind

of get to read that and maybe it just washes over you too.

But I am thinking about it in this way this morning, it is like to you all hearts are open,

all desires known and from you no secrets are hid, it is like you get closer and closer

and closer, God intimately knowing who we are and all of the things that we have done

in secret and not in secret is laid bare before God.

If anyone else said that to me, if anyone caught me in the HB parking lot and said your heart

is open, all desires are known to me and from me no secrets, that is the kind of thing

you walk away, that is a crazy thing to say, that is a thing that a crazy person says.

And we say it, every Sunday we say it.

What should be and what often is for a lot of people a moment of dread

fear, God knows
me, shoot, is met with a word, the word of God that sees you for who
you are, cares for
you and meets you with mercy and grace as it says in verse 16 of our
reading today.
The good news that sits here is that Christ Jesus who is our high
priest is the one that
we can approach and in reaching us at our most interior of places and
knowing the things
about ourselves that we hide that we put on as armor in front of other
people is able
to open us up to the mercy and the grace that Christ brings to our
world.
You heard it today in the parable, not the parable, it's a story, but
the rich young ruler
who comes before Jesus and he says, I have these things, I've kept the
law, I'm wearing
my armor, I'm doing what is right and Jesus tells them to go sell
everything and it is
not a story that is meant, it is not a story that is meant for us to
feel down about that.
I like my money, you like your money too, probably, and the end of
this story though,
in talking with his disciples, Jesus says, no one is able to do this
thing, no one is
able to do what I just told this man, no one can get to heaven without
God, no one can do
anything without the help of God, and that's the word of God cutting
into the most interior
of places, cutting into the places that we protect the most, that we
hide the most and
opening us up to hear something from God, opening us up to hear a word
from the Lord.
At some point all of our disguise is melt away, at some point all of
our armor falls off.
You get caught or you mess up, you get fired, you get incredibly
anxious about not being
known, you decide to get behind the wheel when you know you've had too
much, some at some
point it will happen. If you like you're in a disguise because if
people knew you, if
they knew the real you, what would they do? Would they ridicule you?
Would they not take
you seriously? Would they move to the side and look past you? This
word of God that
is sharp, that cuts to the heart of us, that opens us up to be able to
hear God that
sees us at our most interior and protected spaces is not a cut to
bleed, is not a way for
God to hurt you, but a way to bring light to our darkness, a way to

open up our hidden
worlds, a way to access our frightening spaces that all of us carry.
Thanks be to God, that the word of God can cut us to the heart through
the bread and through
the wine and through the waters of baptism. Thanks be to God, that God
opens our inner
parts, lays us bare, looks at us, looks at you, truly looks at you,
and embraces you with
mercy and offers you grace in your time of need. Amen.