

## New Life in the Double-Edged Sword

 **Cut down to despair** (vv.14,36f)

 **Raised up to new life in Christ** (vv.36,38-47)

In the name of Christ-crucified and risen, dearly redeemed believers:

One of the challenges of finishing our worship folder on Thursday is that I sometimes come up with a different theme for the sermon. What's printed as **New Life in the Double-Edged Sword** is very textual as we'll soon see, but something else occurred to me. And admittedly, I may have just been hungry at the time. What about, "You can have your cake and eat it too"? Let's just jump into the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts. Even though we won't be celebrating the great festival until Mother's Day, there's so much to learn from Peter's Pentecost sermon for your personal life, your family, and our new life together in this congregation. But I can see why some would have wanted to skip the first part of Peter's sermon as **New Life in the Double-Edged Sword** hurts us first...

 **Cut down to despair** (vv.14,36f)

Not long after "April showers bring May flowers," we'll find ourselves in "the dog-days of summer." Word-pictures are also used by the Holy Spirit as He reveals God's thoughts in the Bible. From ancient times He pictured God's Word as a **Double-Edged Sword**. About 1000 B.C., He says of "*the saints*," God's holy believers: "*May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands*" (Psalm 149:6 NIV). Then through the Lord's Apostle Paul, He says to arm ourselves for spiritual battle: "*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17 NIV). It really gets to you, "*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. 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*" (Hebrews 4:12f NIV).

Imagine your most disappointing day times a million. It still would not hurt like what Peter preached to his fellow Jews: "*Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" Recently, a farmer friend and his eighteen-year-old son were cleaning out an auger, when the father threw the wrong switch. Before the accident was over, they both were air lifted to Mayo Clinic, just glad to be alive after that split second mistake. I'll spare the details, but the son will hopefully walk again and the father have use of his hand. It hurts to hear, but what if you and your ancestors were waiting for centuries for the Messiah to come – then you crucified Him?

Still today, some answer, "I did not!" They call the Jews "Christ-killers." A racist American preacher was in the news last week saying the Romans soldiers who nailed Jesus were like Italian Catholics today. But there's really only one healthy response for our souls: *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

The Holy Spirit's **Double--Edged Sword** must **Cut down to despair**. My lack of love for God and my neighbor nailed Jesus to the cross. God's Word says my selfish pride put Him there. I must die to my self-righteousness and let God be true. Then I know what back surgeons say is so important. When all the therapy and drugs have failed, patients beg for relief. The hands that cut also heal.

 **Raised up to new life in Christ** (vv.36,38-47)

Peter's hearers asked, "*What shall we do?*" But notice how he answers. Instead of what to *do*, he tells them to believe. And saving faith is more than just knowing the facts that there is a God who sent

His Son to die and rise again. Saving faith accepts these facts as true for you. But saving faith can only come about when God works a major miracle inside us called “repentance,” literally, *a change of mind*.

Too bad English grammar is so choppy. We need one long sentence to keep everything together that Peter answers when his hearers are **Raised up to new life in Christ**. “*What shall we do?*” is answered something like this: “*Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; for you indeed is the promise and for the children of yours and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God calls.*” It all goes together for adults and children, the Gift which is the Holy Spirit Himself and the gift of faith the Holy Spirit gives through Word and sacrament. Whenever families and children are mentioned with Baptism, all are included, not as a work of man, but by God. “[*God*] *saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*” (Titus 3:5-7 NIV)

The hand that cuts with God’s **Double-Edged Sword** also heals. So do you see the lesson? You can “have your cake and eat it too.” Why did anyone ever say otherwise? What’s the point of having cake if you just look at it? But you know this “cake” is so much more. Let me illustrate what I mean from reading the 1995 version of the Roman Catholic Catechism on Baptism and some sad experience with modern Anabaptists who hate Catholics and Lutherans and tear apart Word and sacraments.

You can be reading along in Rome’s Catechism thinking as I did, “This is really sweet! It’s wonderful they would write such warm and comforting words about the blessed sacrament of Baptism.” But suddenly in the next sentence or paragraph you’re scratching your head. “Baptism needs works too?”

It’s like sitting down to a big piece of my wife’s angel food cake with whipped cream chocolate icing. Just when you’re ready for the first bite of real comfort food, a priest comes in banging a pan. He whacks you with a huge mixing spoon, throws some eggs and a beater on the table and says, “Get to work!” “No!” you counter. “My wife made this cake just right. There’s nothing left to do but eat it!”

So you push him out the door, clean up the mess, and sit down to eat one more time. Someone kicks the door with a bang, and an angry Baptist is leaning over you. He knocks your coffee cup out of your hand. “You shouldn’t be drinking that!” Then he starts pulling your cake apart shouting, “This is icing! This is cake!” spattering all over the floor. “You can’t have your cake and eat it too!”

Oh, but they did, those early Christians. They repented of their sins and joyfully accepted the Lord’s forgiveness the way you ought to enjoy that angel food cake with rich chocolate icing and a whole cup of coffee if you want. “*All the believers were together and had everything in common*”? They kept “*selling their possessions and goods, [and] gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*” From 3,000 converts on Pentecost, “*the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*”

As a Christian parent, remember you have an ally in the heart of your baptized child. You can say to your little one or your teenager, “You want to be good,” and he does. Discipline as God’s representative in the home but always with love because God lives in your child’s heart by this blessed sacrament of Holy Baptism. In your own life wishing you could be a better Christian, remember God already saved us. Instead of tearing the sacraments apart or demanding more works, the early Christians “*devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” **New Life in the Double-Edged Sword** does **Cut down to despair**. Jesus comes gently: “*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*” (Revelation 3:20 NIV) The hand that cuts also heals. Smile like Martin Luther and just say: “I am baptized.” Then thank God and enjoy your cake. Amen.