

## **A Bold Approach**

Hebrews 4:12-16

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Indeed, 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.

## **A Bold Approach**

Hebrews 4:12-16

October 10, 2021

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### **I.**

I am going to start today by telling you that I'm sick of myself. Mind you, not scads and gobs, but a little bit sick of myself for sure; more than enough to flavor the stew. Part of it, undoubtedly, is that some amount of curmudgeonliness is to be expected as one gets older. Another part of it comes from being in the later stages of one's job or career. Habits, at any age, undoubtedly also play a role, not to mention that the times in which we live easily fan flames such as these. There might be some degree of plain, old-fashioned laziness involved as well. Finally, it doesn't help that every week I need to serve as a lens to try and shed some light on whatever scripture reading the lectionary serves up each Sunday and, so, I become hyper-aware of how I'm filtering and adjusting the light so it illuminates one particular place in the darkness rather than another.

### **II.**

Take, for example, today's scripture reading from Hebrews chapter 4. At Wednesday's service at Partridge Knoll, I was expounding on this passage and found myself dipping back into the same old well about the importance of having integrity, doing the right thing, and emphasizing that at some point an account must be rendered for who we are and what we do. Kind of the Presbyterian equivalent of a Baptist preacher talking incessantly about Judgement Day. Though I was careful to avoid any mention of fire and brimstone, it amounts to pretty much the same thing. I *really* don't want to end up becoming "that kind" of *preacher*, all too easily and far too often finding the fault in the world and happily telling you all about it Sunday after Sunday.

Moreover, I don't want to be that kind of *person* who is content sees the world in the same old, tired ways; and, eventually, becomes sick of themselves. It is so easy to do, though, isn't it? In fact, I think it is default destination we all end up at in one form or another unless we change our course (which is hard) or have it changed for us (which is harder).

### III.

I got changed a few weeks back. I'm trying to drag this park & fountain project over the finish line which, after 4 years, I'm pretty sick of as well. With the fountain done, we've moved on to the tree work, which should have started this weekend (actually, it should have started two months ago, but that a different story). As part of this, and in an effort to avoid people coming for me with tar and feathers when they hear the chainsaws start up, at the beginning of September we offered two "Greet The Green" events, where we walked folks through the park to show the trees we proposed to take down, and explained the rationale for doing so. These events were only lightly attended (refreshments probably would have helped) but all went well, and I assumed I had checked the box.

### IV.

Then, more than three weeks *later*, and just days before we were to finalize the contract with the tree service, I got copied on a long email conversation which was taking place with members of the Canton Tree Committee, with a couple members (neither of whom attended the walk-through) pushing to *inoculate* the two Ash trees we have in the park to possibly safeguard them from the Emerald Ash Borer, rather than *remove* them as was the plan and is generally advised.

As you might expect, I found their kibitzing at the late hour rather annoying. However, this whole Park endeavor has taught me to put aside my own issues in service to the greater good. Not out of any sense of nobleness, but because that is the only way that things like this get down.

### V.

Hence, even though I was still on vacation (a further source of irritation) I contacted SLC Forester Aaron Barrigar, the contractor who was awarded the job, a colleague of my brother in the Forestry Department at the University of Massachusetts, as well as the DEC which awarded the grant and a member of the Town Board that provided the matching funds to see if we could shift some of the money from cutting to inoculating. I also had to admit I didn't know very much about this issue so I watched a 45 minute video on YouTube "Planning for Emerald Ash Borer - Best Practices for Managing Adirondack Ash Woodlands" presented by the ADK Park Invasive Plant Program. I

reviewed the information available at [www.emeraldashborer.info](http://www.emeraldashborer.info) and [www.imapinvasives.org](http://www.imapinvasives.org), and did a benefit assessment using the National Tree Benefit Calculator found on the [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org) website. All this in a matter of a few days. And you know what? It changed me.

## **VI.**

Because the one Ash tree, located at the north side of the fountain, has a split trunk and unavoidably incurred quite a bit of root damage during the construction process it isn't a good candidate for inoculation. However, the other larger Ash tree, located by the VFW monument, is well worth trying to save; though there are no guarantees when it comes to such matters.

It is going to cost a pretty penny, however. Whereas removing it would be about \$1k (and we have the money in-hand for this) the cost to treat the tree for the next 30 years is about \$6k; including a contingency to fund remove if inoculation fails. I got the DEC to shift over \$2K, and the Town Board another \$2k, leaving \$2k yet to raise (I have ideas). I explained all of this to the Tree Committee and told them we were willing to try and save the one Ash tree, but we need to have the funding in place, *now*, rather than pass the problem on to other people and a future generation. Then, I invited them to contribute to the cause.

## **VII.**

To date, I have received one check from one person in the amount of \$67; the average cost for one year's treatment. Though such a poor response is no surprise at all and, truth be told, I wasn't really expecting much of one, I felt it was important to make the point; which I believe I did.

I tell you all of this for two reasons. First to keep you, as owners of the Park and my employer, in the loop as to what is going on both in the Park and behind the scenes. Second, and more germane for us this morning, to explain why I did the about-face on the Ash tree. It certainly would have been easier to just cut it down, and greatly appealed to my "get it done" mentality. I love to check a box, and from the perspective of managing time and energy, I always try not to take on even one more thing if ever possible. However, one simple sentence among the great many/too many offered in that very long email conversation leapt off the screen at me and lodged in my brain.

## VIII.

The DEC person who heads up the grant wrote: “*the most important thing is your community will know what an Ash tree looks like, and they will remember that their village saved the Ash trees!*” Without getting into the weeds about the Emerald Ash Borer, it is an invasive and non-native insect whose larva girds the tree by boring beneath the bark, preventing water and nutrients from flowing back and forth from root to leaves, killing it in very short order. The spread from tree to tree is rapid, and generally goes undetected until the adults emerge leaving tell-tale D-shaped holes; by that point, however, the damage has been done. Though we have been lucky up until now, the EAB was found last month in some Ash trees in Potsdam. It is very likely, in just a few short years, there will be NO Ash trees left in our region, the Northeast or, perhaps, our country. Except, that is, for those few being treated like the one in our Park by VFW monument.

## IX.

When I consider the kids growing up in our church I’m pleased that, at the very least, they will know what an Ash tree looks like; more importantly, so will *their* children. That said, I really don’t think anyone will remember that our village, or church, helped to save that Ash tree; which is fine, as such acclaim really isn’t much of a motivator. However, *I* will know and, now, so will *you*; and that is a reckoning I can live with and for which I can live.

When we look at a scripture passage like the one before us this morning from Hebrews chapter 4, it is easy to imagine and believe in the power of the Word of God as living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; and being able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must all render an account.

## X.

However, whereas my old, lazy and curmudgeonly self, of which I’ve grown sick, might read these words as a driver of fear, my recent experience with the Ash tree, specifically, and the Fountain renovation more generally, has changed me (Praise the Lord!). I now read these words not as warning, but as an *opportunity*. If, some day, we can expect to be judged for who we are, and

what we have done (or failed to do) it also implicitly implies that the opportunity exists to change who we are and what we do. That the future, both ours as individuals and the world collectively, is still forming and open to influence and redirection...for the good. Yes, we *will* be held accountable, but only because with great privilege comes great responsibility. We have been entrusted with the Keys to the Kingdom, so let's do something *cool* with them! Let's take a bold approach to our lives, the choices we make and the actions we take.

## **XI.**

Bold doesn't necessarily mean *big*, however. This whole endeavor with the Park is a rare, once in a several generation opportunity (or onus, depending how you look at it). As such, it is atypical and unusual. However, the truth is that for each one of us just about every day brings some form of opportunity to take a bold approach; to change ourselves and to bring change to our world. To help ourselves, and each other, get past our curmudgeonliness, get out of our ruts and routines, to form new, healthier habits, overcome lethargy, and to keep our balance regardless of how off-kilter the world seems to be spinning. When we do so, when we bring the living and active Word of God to bear on our lives, we receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need; and we begin to shake off that "sick of myself" feeling. Amen.