

**“Where Are You?”**  
**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - June 6, 2021 - Mark 3:20-35/B**

(Old Testament Lesson)

Adam and Eve heard the sound of the LORD God  
walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze,  
and the man and his wife hid themselves  
from the presence of the LORD God  
among the trees of the garden.

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’  
He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden,  
and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’  
He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked?’

Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’  
The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me,  
she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’

Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’  
The woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate.’ *Genesis 3:8-13*

It was a beautiful evening with just enough breeze to whisk away the heat of the day. Adam and Eve - out for a twilight stroll in Paradise - should have been the most content of creatures. But then they heard the sound of God walking, and because they were ashamed of their ill-gotten knowledge - the awareness of their own nakedness - they hid among the trees. Adam, strolling in his own back yard, feared an encounter with the One who gave him life, because he had broken their sacred trust. It had all come down to this one moment, and Adam’s anxiety began to overwhelm him, when God had simply called out, “Where are you?”

There is something sad about this story because we have all shared in it. We have made a mistake, and felt guilty. We have told a lie, and were caught in it. We have broken a sacred trust and hurt someone. We have disobeyed and fallen short, and we know it. I would imagine that there are very few of us who have not experienced an immediate defensive response to cover up the fact that we know that we have failed, and it’s our fault. We deserve God’s anger. We deserve the consequences of our actions. But God did not come to the Garden that evening to punish anyone. (Jn 3:17 “God did not come into the world to condemn the world...”) For God is pure love - his motivation is pure desire for our company - or as we Lutherans might say it, God’s default position is “pure grace.”

WHY do we keep trying to define the intentions of God’s heart, (which our hearts refuse to accept,) and WHY do we seem to prefer the fear response that grips our heart every time we are found out. WHY can we not see in ourselves what God sees so clearly? And where in the world did we get the idea that we are supposed to be perfect? God never expected that of us - so who was it that took delight in pointing out to us that we are naked? (You’d think that having a God that loves us so completely would be enough.) Yet we are continually listening to the crafty snakes in our lives who suggest that we need to distort God’s intentions toward us.

Maybe we just need a fresh look, a different point of view on this scene that we might recall as God’s “gotcha” of Adam. What if we could hear God’s simple question, “Where *are* you?” with a touch of yearning on God’s part? We might imagine an encounter

between Creator and creature sounding more like, “Adam? Adam, where are **YOU?**” Where is the one I created and loved in the beginning - the one I have cared for and nourished, the one who fulfilled my dreams as the pinnacle of my creation? Don’t you know that I love you no matter what? Where are YOU, beloved child?

Maybe it would be easier to just ask, “Why do we fear a God who loves?” Might it be that a God who loves is just too good to be true? Or do we have trouble surrendering to that amazingly good news because, in fact, we don’t really **know** God. Now, maybe you know a lot ABOUT God, but do you **really** know - from your own experience - the God who is described in the Bible in broad-brush images and fascinating detail - over and over again, from Genesis 1 to the end of Revelation. Do you really know - from your own experience - the God who is revealed in the person of Jesus and who is omnipresent and omnipotent in wisdom? How much more is there to learn? Reflect today, for example, on where the Father Creator has touched your soul? When did the death of our beloved Jesus become real to you so that Easter morning was almost *unreal* compared to Good Friday? And how has the Holy Spirit who is present with each one of our breaths, filled you with a fresh start, another new beginning, a lifetime of morning wakeups and chances to share God’s love when someone you care about is in pain?

There is so much to explore through the witness of all the Gospel writers, and for the rest of the summer we will hear more from the unique point of view in the Gospel of Mark. So, let’s explore together, using a framework of a God who is searching for us, yearning to draw us into faith, delighting when one lost son returns home. Forget about anything we might have brought along with us that whispers that God is out to catch us in our sin; and hear and see the story with an eye to understanding God “grace”-fully.

At the beginning of Mark, we meet Jesus as a grown man, for there is no Christmas story in Mark (check it out!) But Jesus has already met up with John the Baptist and been baptized, he’s been to the wilderness and back, and John is in prison. So, Jesus begins his own ministry. Where John the Baptist had called for his followers to repent! and change their lifestyle, Jesus began his ministry with the work of re-creation: *making all things new*.

First, he calls four fishermen at Sea of Galilee. At the synagogue in Capernaum, he casts out unclean spirits, and then heals crowds of folks while preaching this message: “*The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.*” (OR, in short) *It’s time. I’m here. Repent and Believe.* His words and actions draw huge crowds. That’s when people who were NOT experiencing him one-on-one began to listen to voices of fear rather than the ones who spoke only of love.

His ministry of meeting people’s needs started ticking folks off: He invited an outcast tax collector to follow him. Then, he and his disciples began “bending” the rules. And finally, Jesus healed the withered hand of a man on the sabbath day. But what really made them fear was that Jesus acted on the authority of God’s love that breathed life into the Law, rather than focusing on the Law by itself.

Something inside them knew his way was a threat to their way. Somewhere inside they feared, knowing they were losing ground to a way of life that was (for them) completely wrong. Dangerous. So, while the Pharisees fears protected religious purity and their way of life, Jesus’ family was listening to voices to protect him from hurting himself (he is out of his mind) or cautioning that his politics were not playing well with Rome. Regardless, they wanted to stop him.

Meanwhile, Jesus was so busy healing, touching, loving – he and his followers didn't even have time to eat, or to be distracted by the family filled with fear. But none of that mattered. Jesus looked around the crowds at the faces of those who needed: the possessed, who needed release; the diseased, who needed healing; the outcast and disenfranchised, who yearned for community; the disabled, who longed to see, or hear, or walk - who believed in who he was and what he was doing right in front of them! Jesus looked around at all who had come to him on their darkest days and found hope and a loving God. They were claimed - just as Craig will be claimed today through Baptism. Faces in the crowd became children of a heavenly father. They became Jesus' family. They became the Body of Christ.

The extraordinary preacher, Tom Long, always points to one place in each sermon where he can say, *"There is a word of the Lord for today...see, there is where Jesus is at work in our world right now..."* I feel an urgency these days to see and to point to where and how Jesus is at work in our world right now...

How can we get beyond the fear of following, really following - and ask instead, *"Where are YOU, Jesus? I want to know YOU as well as you want to find the real me again!"* Since God already knows who we truly are, are we brave enough to really allow Jesus into our lives? What would that even look like? Change of heart? Seeking to be with rather than to be right? Standing up for the little guy? Speaking only Truth with Love?

It's been said that God is homeless without our hearts in which to dwell. So, if God is looking for a place to live, let it be in us! If Jesus is looking for His family - his literal body of Christ, let us be the ones he sees and knows as well as we know our own hands and feet.

We are called to be different, set apart to live an alternative lifestyle, guided from outside ourselves - by the one who looks into our eyes and sees nothing beyond our believing hearts. Who asks "Where are YOU" and finds nothing but who we were created to be. God knows Where YOU Are; Jesus has been Where YOU Are; the Spirit *is present* Where YOU Are.

So, let's sing together our Hymn for Today - #798 "Will you Come and Follow Me?" and let out the YOU that God is longing to see. Then, Follow Jesus. Amen.

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Resources: Mark Sayers in *The Disappearing Church*; Tom Long, *Festival of Homiletics/Minneapolis*; Rite of Marriage in *Lutheran Book of Worship*;

