

## From the Pastor's Desk

### Where Are You?

“Adam and Eve heard the sound of God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from God among the trees of the garden. But God called to them, ‘Where are you?’” Genesis 3:8-9

Can you see yourself in this story? As you hide in the garden, God calls out to you and says: (put in your name) “\_\_\_\_\_, where are you?”

God is searching for you and wants to be with you. Could it be? Does God really want to be with me? Could it be that God's attitude toward me is like my dog Joey who gets all excited whenever I arrive home? More than anything else, he wants to be with me. Right now, as I type this in my office at Church, I know Joey is at home waiting for me. I want to be with him, too.

“\_\_\_\_\_”, God says, “Where are you? I want to be with you.” Let's be honest, how does it really feel to have God want to be with you? Truly now, in your heart how many of you want to hide? How many of us feel shame as we stand naked in the presence of God and, like Adam and Eve, want to cover ourselves. “I heard you in the garden,” they said, “and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?”

Mom told a story of a time when she and dad lived in an apartment above the newspaper office in Beach, ND, and my sister Linda, who was only five years old, was nowhere to be found. As they frantically searched for her, she was finally located in a western wear store window next door sitting on a saddle wearing nothing but a smile with a crowd gathered around laughing.

In her original innocence, she had yet to eat from the tree of knowledge, but that would come in time, as it does for all of us.

It is interesting that Jewish people do not look at the Adam and Eve story as “The Fall”. No, it is a story of the inevitable result of maturing as a human being. At some point, we all have to eat from the tree of knowledge and rather than a fall down, it is a fall up where freewill is received, which most clearly distinguishes humans from animals.

God seems rather harsh with his penalties for this new knowledge.

To Eve he says: “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Genesis 3:16

And to Adam he says: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Genesis 3:17-19

Gee wiz, this seems cruel. Adam and Eve went from God wanting to be with them, to being cursed and booted out of the Garden of Eden. What's so bad about growing in knowledge of good and evil? Isn't this exactly what we are teaching our kids to do?

But, we must remember one important thing. It was written after the fact! God was not forecasting future events. The authors of Genesis were observing present reality and trying to understand the ramifications of freewill, why women gave birth in pain (indeed at this time many of them died during childbirth), and why men had to scratched the earth in the heat of the sun to plant food to survive, only to die and return to dust. This was the reality the authors observed and were trying to make some sense out of when they wrote this story. We make the mistake of trying to read it as factual history rather than a metaphorical narrative that is attempting to understand the human condition. In so doing, we miss the main point of the story which is: unlike other animals, humans have the power of freewill and the potential to use it for good or evil. It is a story about the birth of human consciousness.

Shame is an awful thing, which we can carry throughout our lives. It's a belief that deep down, there is something wrong with us. It's a feeling that we are bad and God has rejected us. This sense of alienation from God is exacerbated if we view the Genesis story as factual history.

I have never struck Joey. I've spoken sternly to him and even laid him on his back forcing submission when he tried to exert his authority as the alpha male! But I have never struck him. I want Joey to come to me when I call him and if he thinks he will receive anything but love, he will be reluctant to come.

How can we come out from hiding behind trees when God calls us, if we fear his wrath? How can we have intimacy with God when we think he has cursed us, or when hell, fire and damnation sermons still ring in our ears?

Where this really comes to roost is when we lay on our death bed. I have often thought of the dreadful day when it is time for Joey to go to God. If a shot is necessary, I want to hold him and as the shot is administered, whisper in his ear that I love him and hold him close. And then Joan and I will cry hard and deep. Such is love on this side of the sod where we see an end, when in fact it's a beginning.

It is like the lady in the nursing home who had fallen asleep and was dreaming about her son in her womb fifty years earlier. He was afraid to be born and was certain that when he left the warmth of her womb, he would die. So she tried to convince him by saying, "What good are your hands and feet in there? They are meant for walking and working out here." And she said, "What about the love in your heart? It's meant to be shared out here. Don't be afraid, there will be darkness and you will go through a tunnel and see a light, and I will be here with a big smile and my arms open wide!"

Suddenly, she opened her eyes and heard a voice. "It's time, Ann." She looked around but saw no one. Then she knew it was the Lord. "It's time, Ann, for you to come." She was frightened, but again heard the voice, "You will see darkness, then go through a tunnel and see a light, and I will be here with a big smile and my arms open wide!"

"\_\_\_\_\_, where are you?", God asks. "There you are \_\_\_\_\_! Come out from behind those trees. I can see you. Come, let me hold you."

Close your eyes and see Jesus walking to you with his arms open wide with a big smile. Walk into his arms and feel his embrace and the warmth of his heart entering into your heart.

"I love you!", Jesus says. "I know it has not been easy. I am pleased with you. You are mine and I will never let you go."

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