

Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 6, 2021
 “Where Are You?” (Genesis 3:8-15)

This past Christmas was a really special time for our family. Because each unit had maintained its own little bubble, we felt safe gathering during the pandemic. It was a blessing we didn’t take lightly, for we knew many families didn’t have that luxury.

After everyone arrived and settled in, I led the grandkids on a scavenger hunt for all the characters of the nativity. When all were found, we told the story of Jesus’ birth. That was followed by the opening of presents. This year, Susan had packaged them all as reindeer. The opening was organized chaos, but a lot of fun. After our meal, the adults gathered in the den while the kids played throughout the house. They especially enjoyed going upstairs because there is lots of room for them to do whatever it is they do. Aside from a bedroom and large playroom, there is also a closet up there. Among the things we store in it are paper towels and toilet paper we buy in bulk from Sam’s.

At one point I went to check on them. When I arrived at the bottom of the stairs, I found paper towels and toilet paper cascading down like a white waterfall – rolls and rolls of them. And upstairs, it resembled a newly fallen snow. *What are y’all doing?* I asked. It was obvious, of course, but I needed to get their attention. Immediately, the blame game began. *It was Spencer. No, Camden did it first. Evelyn did it too. They were throwing them at me!*

I decided I couldn’t do the P-Pa thing and let it go – even if it was Christmas. So I said, *Everybody downstairs. You’re all in time out for five minutes.* Like a little band of soldiers, they made their way down the stairs and found a seat in the den. But when I looked around, one of them was missing. *Where is Evelyn?* I asked. *She’s in the office,* I was told. *She thinks you’re mad at her.* So I went looking for her.

I found her, hiding under my desk, crying pitifully. My heart broke. I pulled her out and up onto my lap. Wrapping my arms tightly around her, I tried to comfort her. *It’s ok. I’m not mad. Yes, you made a bad choice in unrolling all that paper. We all make bad choices sometimes, but I love you very much. There is nothing you could ever do that would make me stop loving you.* Finally, I comforted her enough to stop her crying. She gave me a hug and told me she was sorry.

I tell you this story because it reflects a part of our human nature that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Our first reading from Genesis picks up right after the first man and woman have eaten from the forbidden tree. Up to this point, they have lived a life in perfect harmony with God. They have spent their days walking and talking with God, but now they are in hiding. Why? Because they have disobeyed God and, in doing so, have destroyed that perfect relationship. Like little Evelyn, they are ashamed of what they have done and afraid of the punishment they know they deserve. They somehow think that hiding behind a tree will keep God from finding them.

As God walks through the garden, he calls out to them. *Where are you?* God, of course, knows exactly where they are. So if he is not seeking information as to their whereabouts, his question

must have a greater purpose. It was like my asking the grandkids, *What are you doing?* What they were doing was obvious: they were making a holy mess with toilet paper. But I needed them to think about their deed; to stop and consider why wasting that paper may not have been a good idea. Likewise, God is inviting Adam and Eve to examine their action of eating from the forbidden tree, to consider their motive in doing so, and come to an understanding of why it was wrong. So *Where are you?* is not a query of their physical location. It's more a question of the place they are spiritually. It's to get them to consider where they should be.

God still comes to each of us with this question. Where are you? Are you inside the circle with Jesus or outside with the scribes and Pharisees? Are you putting your trust in temporal things – things the Apostle Paul tells us are seen - or in things that are eternal – those things that are unseen? Are you at a place where you truly love and trust God above all things? Or have other people and things taken a priority? Your family, your job, your paycheck, your 401k? How would we answer that question?

Adam and Eve know they were not where they should be. Instead of continuing to be in that perfectly harmonious relationship with God, walking and talking with him, enjoying fellowship with him, they are now trying to avoid him. You see, the moment they ate from the tree, they were aware that something new had taken place inside them: their conscience had been awakened. Aware that they have committed a wrong, they now experience guilt which causes them to become fearful of God and his judgment. They also experience shame and, for the first time, recognize their nakedness and vulnerability.

Who told you that you were naked? God asks. *Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?* But instead of answering the question directly, the first man and woman play the blame game – just as my grandchildren did. Adam goes first: *The woman whom you gave to be with me gave me the fruit and I ate it.* Adam not only throws Eve under the bus, but also points the finger at God. He is essentially saying, *This would have never happened if you hadn't created this woman.* With the attention now on her, Eve plays the game, too. *The serpent tricked me, and I ate. It was all his fault.*

Blame is the human way we often deal with guilt. When we don't want to be held responsible for our actions, when we don't want to admit we are wrong, we blame others or, to mitigate our own guilt, make them culpable in our actions. *I am abusive because my parents were too strict. I had an affair because my spouse shows me no affection. I am a thief because I grew up poor. I lost my temper and said hurtful things because she provoked me. God, why did you put me in this situation? Why did you place these obstacles in my path?* Yes, we all play this game.

Yet, in spite of their efforts to hide from God and pass the blame – in spite of our efforts to do the same – the question still remains. *Where are you?* God sees through all the excuses and the blaming and keeps asking.

The question, you see, is ultimately to lead Adam and Eve to repentance. They need to recognize and acknowledge their action for what it was: sin. That sin had broken their relationship with God and filled them with guilt and shame. After hiding from God, after shifting the blame, there

is nothing left for them to say. Finally, both Adam and Eve have to admit their wrongdoing. They both say, *and I ate*. They are at God's mercy.

That's where we find ourselves, as well. Sin is a problem in our lives each and every day. We may pretend it's not there. We may attempt to hide it from God. We may cast the blame somewhere else. But ultimately, there's nothing left for us to say, but *I am a sinner, and have been from birth. Have mercy on me*.

God takes sin seriously. He never ignores it or brushes it aside. That would minimize the gravity of sin and compromise God's holiness and justice. God must confront sin. But the good news is that he does it graciously. His goal is restoration of the relationship. God's desire is not to judge and condemn sinners, but to save them. At the point we acknowledge our sin, God takes over and deals with our guilt his way.

The question, *Where are you?* not only serves as a call to repentance, but ultimately, it is an invitation to comfort. God could have cursed Adam and Eve and sent them directly to hell. Instead, he curses the serpent – a curse directed both to the actual snake and to Satan, who used the snake for his evil deeds. The snake is cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust. Satan is condemned to an existence of frustration and defeat. *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel*.

The Lord wanted Adam and Eve to hear this. He was telling them that he would take it upon himself to repair the damage they had caused by their disobedience. He would put enmity between Satan's offspring and Eve's. This refers to the battle of the ages between the ungodly, who are children of the devil, and the children of God. But God goes on to say that *he* – a singular, particular offspring of the woman – would strike Satan on the head, and Satan would strike him on the heel. This refers to Christ, born of a woman, the last Adam, who would finally redeem the fallen race. So, here we have the earliest promise of a redeemer, and it comes as a surprise in this context of judgment. But its unexpectedness makes God's grace shine all the brighter.

At the cross, Satan did in fact strike the heel of Jesus. Jesus' suffering and death were real and painful. He endured the torment of hell that we deserved for our sins. He became our guilt. He became our shame. God hid his face from his son because he had become too stained with our sin. Jesus cried out, wanting his Father to help him, to be with him in his hour of greatest need. *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* But God's Son would die forsaken, the embodiment of evil for you and me.

Satan saw his strike of Jesus' heel as a great victory for him and a terrible defeat for God. But the light dawned on Easter morning to reveal the smiling face of God. Jesus' suffering and death were not permanent. He rose from the dead. And by the power of his death and resurrection, Jesus crushed the serpent's head.

Through the cross and the empty tomb, we find forgiveness from our sins and reconciliation with the God who loves us. Jesus' victory over sin and death is our victory. Satan has no power over

us. What seemed like his moment of triumph was actually the eve of his greatest defeat. He thought he was gaining the upper hand on God, but was actually carrying out the sovereign purposes of God's eternal plan. So here, in this context, when Adam and Eve could rightly expect to be condemned to hell for their sin, God promises the defeat of Satan and the victory of the Redeemer who would come from Eve's descendants.

Where are you? Are you hiding, afraid of God, because of sin in your life? Are you trying to cover your sin with the fig leaves of your good works? Are you minimizing it by blaming others? Perhaps, like Jonah, you are running from God and his purpose for your life. Maybe you have unconfessed sin and your guilt is making you think that God is out to punish you.

This story tells us that God comes looking for us. Just as I went looking for little Evelyn, God comes to us, graciously calling, *Where are you?* in order to save us from the judgment our sin deserves. It is a call to confess and repent – to acknowledge how we have failed to live as the people of God – but more importantly it is an invitation to comfort: the comfort of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ, the comfort of knowing that all our sins are washed away and that we didn't do anything to earn or deserve it. Our Redeemer comes to us to restore us to our place as a member of his family – to name us as his brother, his sister, and his mother. Thanks be to our God of grace. And all God's people say, Amen.