

“A Promise in the Garden”

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8-9).

When I was a kid we spent our summers outside. There was no Facebook. There was no such thing as Netflix. We had an old black and white television but we didn't have cable and video games hadn't been invented yet, so we spent almost every waking moment outside. Shoeless, shirtless and without any concern for sunscreen or suspicious neighbors we ruled the outdoors and the backyard was our kingdom. We passed the daylight hours playing Wiffle ball or riding our bikes or simply hanging out in our tree house, but as soon as the sun started to set and the light began to fade we would gather with the other kids in our neighborhood and we would play “hide and seek.”

As the night wore on and the darkness thickened, the “hidiers” would start to be discovered and in a matter of 15 or 20 minutes most of the hiding spots were revealed. But there were always a couple of kids who refused to be found; who had hidden themselves so well that their location eluded everyone. And finally, after what felt like hours of silent searching, all of the “found” would wander around the yard pleading with the hidden players to show themselves, shouting into the night, “Greg (or Glenn or Kevin)! *Where are you?*”

In so many ways, this is one of life's most important questions. As we grow up and move through different seasons and stages, the meaning of this question goes through many changes but, at its heart, “Where are you?” is always a relationship question and it betrays a break in our connection to another. Once we were together, now we are separate. Once there was harmony, now there is conflict. Once we were best friends, now we don't even talk. Once we were “in love” and now we can't even be in the same room with each other. In our marriages, in our friendships, with our parents or children, with neighbors and co-workers the question “Where are you?” is always a question of relationship. It's an attempt to unmask and reveal the things that divide us and nowhere is this question more critical than in our relationship with the Lord.

In today's reading from Genesis we find ourselves right in the middle of what is perhaps the most pivotal story in all of Scripture. You see, in the verses that lead up to today's text, Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord. Giving-in to Satan's temptation, they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and their eyes were opened. For the first time, they recognized their nakedness. For the first time, they knew sin. For the first time, they felt the sting of shame. For the first time, they were afraid. And for the first time in the human story, man and woman hid from their creator. I can't overstate the significance of this event. Here, in the garden, sin entered the human heart. Here, in the garden, God's perfect creation began to decay and groan. And here, in the garden, our spiritual DNA changed as every last one of us inherited the sin of our first parents. Paul comments about the terrible weight of this event in Romans 5 when he writes that in this one act of rebellion “sin entered the world...and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people.” Adam and Eve had rejected God's word. They had broken the perfect fellowship for which they were made and now they were hiding in abject fear...and, thanks to this event, we all know exactly how this feels.

Where are you? The question God asked Adam in the garden is a question He has asked us as well. And the truth is that we don't want to answer God anymore than he did. We hate to be confronted in our sin. We squirm at the thought of accountability and the “old Adam” and “old Eve” inside of us pull us right back into the trees of the garden, alone with our guilt; paralyzed by our pride; content to stay hidden. And when our hiding place is discovered our reaction is predictable and pathetic as we go right back to the excuses and blame offered by Adam and Eve.

When our girls were little we used play “hide and seek” in our basement and I must admit that finding them was never much of challenge. I would close my eyes, slowly beginning my count to ten, and all the while I could hear their panicked whispers and little feet scurrying around them room. And when I knew they had finally settled on a spot, I'd open my eyes and begin my search with the words “Ready or not, here I come.” Now, I use the term

“search” loosely, because the girls would invariably hide in a place that exposed about three quarters of their bodies. Their eyes were hidden and I’m sure that they couldn’t see me, but their hiding place was certainly no mystery.

And that’s exactly how it is with God. He knows the truth. He knows where we are hiding. He sees our hearts and is familiar with our secrets. In fact, God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah, “My eyes are on all (your) ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is (your) sin concealed” (Jeremiah 16:17). In the book of Hebrews we are told, “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 4:13). The reality of our situation before a holy, righteous, all-knowing, all-powerful God is *not good* and the truth is that God doesn’t need to ask any questions. He knew good and well where Adam and Eve were and He had every reason to destroy them on the spot...but there, in stillness of the garden, in the cool of the day, God asks, “Where are you?”

It’s important for us to consider the reason for this question but, no matter how you slice it, this question was not asked for God’s benefit. It was asked for ours. You see, this question in the garden is a question of relationship and it provided Adam and Eve with the opportunity to confess their sin to God. And it is this very same question that God asks of us today.

Where are you? With these words God speaks to His people. With these words, God *seeks* His people! And with these words God reestablishes a connection to sinners like us who have gone their own way. And even though we try to justify our sin and blame others and make excuse after excuse for our blatant disobedience, *God in His mercy* pursues us with this question. He seeks us out, He finds us hiding in our sin and He speaks to us...and He does it not to punish, but to promise.

God is not the one who is lost. We are! And this is an urgently serious matter! It’s so easy for us to downplay the lethal nature of our sin, but in His word, God makes it clear that *every* sin is an attack on Him and *every* sin is a step away from His grace and *every* sin is enough to separate us from Him forever! But, for reasons that our selfish hearts can’t even begin to fathom, God refused to let sin have the last word. There in the garden God confronted our sin. There in the garden God sought His people out. There in the garden, God called us out of the darkness and He give a promise that He would provide One who would crush the head of the serpent (3:15).

This promise in the garden was the beginning of a story that carried and sustained God’s people throughout the Old Testament. This promise in the garden is what led Noah to build the ark, trusting in the Word of the Lord. And this promise in the garden gave faith to Abraham and courage to Moses and forgiveness to David. This promise in the garden led the prophets to speak of One who would bring salvation through suffering and this promise in the garden was kept in full when, “at just the right time,” Paul tells us, “God sent His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

This promise in the garden is the first and greatest Gospel message mankind ever heard. And God didn’t wait for us to come around before He spoke it. Like Adam and Eve, we are unwilling participants in our salvation. We desire to remain hidden and without God’s action we would be lost forever. But in the garden, God made a promise to send a Savior and in Jesus Christ this promise was kept. God has called each one of us out of darkness and into His marvelous light and His promise for you and for me – *no matter how far we have wandered, no matter how well we have hidden* – is that in the death and resurrection of Jesus our sin has been punished, we are forgiven and we have been restored to live in a right relationship with God now and forever.

This Gospel promise teaches us to run *to* God rather than from Him. This Gospel promise enables us to face the difficult things in life because “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (II Corinthians 4:17). And this Gospel promise reminds us that just as God kept His word to Adam and Eve, He will keep the promises He has made to us. God is faithful! He will not leave us in our sin and He will not forget His promise in the garden. Amen.

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