

When my three boys were young children, the middle one seemed to always be getting himself into trouble. He tended to cross boundaries and do naughty things more frequently than the other two boys. And, when he did something wrong, he would often hide, or he would inevitably blame his brothers for what happened, for what he had done. Thankfully, he outgrew these behaviors. However, I will always remember that if he was blaming his brothers for something that happened, he usually was the one who was responsible for the incident and, if he was hiding, he had probably done something he should not have done. In fact, I vividly remember calling out to him on multiple occasions, “Chris, where are you?” Well, today as we hear this reading from Genesis, we hear the words, “Where are you?” And, these words echo right down through the centuries into **our** very lives.

The Genesis story we hear in our first reading is part of the **second** creation story we find in the Bible. Yes, there are **two** very **different** creation stories in this first book of the Bible. Today’s reading comes from what is known as the Yahwist narrative. It is just one among many of the early story threads gathered from multiple traditions that became sewn together to compile the book we now call Genesis. And, as with many familiar Bible stories we **think** we understand, we often read into this

passage and deduce ideas that really are not there. You see, this whole slithering, deceptive snake portion of the story likely was originally told to explain the animosity that exists between humans and serpents.

Furthermore, as scholars have studied these writings, theologians now agree that the snake insertion into this story was also likely meant to provide an explanation for the Israelite rejection of the Canaanite goddess Asherah, who was imaged as a snake in a tree. Asherah was the great Canaanite fertility goddess, so one can detect here a not too subtle polemic against Canaanite pagan religion. And, yet another aspect that we usually do not grasp is that this serpent who appears in the story is **never** even identified in scripture as Satan.

As today's story begins in verse eight, the serpent has already deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God's command, and these two human beings are now engaged in a hiding activity of their own, and the stakes are very high. As they hunker down in the garden like children attempting to hide while fleeing the implications of their own actions, God seeks them out, fully aware that something has gone wrong. God goes walking in the garden like the whimsical pursuer. And, we get to listen as God calls out to them saying, "Where are you?"

Now, it is fascinating that this is the first question God asks in Scripture. And, what makes this question so important is that, as in every great story, this question is asked not just of the characters on the page and in this scene, it is a question that is asked of each one of **us**. You see, **the** stories of the Bible are **our** stories! The Bible itself is such a great story because it is not so much a story of what happened to our ancestors in faith, but of what happens to each one of **us**. This story is no exception.

Notice that God does **not** accusingly ask, “Now just what have you done?” No. God simply and graciously asks, “Where are you?” This question, a question God is always asking of us, exposes our futile attempt to hide from God. And, at once, that question assumes an answer, an answer that reminds us we often are not where we should be. In fact, it causes us to think about asking ourselves, “Where **should** we be?” It is also important to notice that when they answer, God just lets the excuses flow on until all the characters of the story have fully implicated themselves and each other. And, only then does God announce the sanctions.

Friends, this story is a tale about the human predicament - sin. Something has gone wrong. We are not where we should be. You see, we sense that there is an estrangement from our essential, created selves that is rooted in alienation from our Maker, and it gets expressed in behaviors

that alienate us from one another. That is what sin is, alienation from God, from one another and from our very selves. This story in Genesis is **not** a literal story of what happened to our first ancestors but the story of what happens to **each one of us**. This is a story that addresses our loss of innocence as we grow up and become more aware of the world around us. It is about our alienation from our fellow humans, from creation itself, about our yearning for independence, and our fear of alienation from God. This story helps us understand the way in which sin alienates us from God and from one another because the hard truth is that we are sinners. That does not mean we are rotten to the core. Sin **is** the human predicament. And, even though we try to hide while fleeing the implications of our predicament, God knows where we are. The truth is that we **cannot** hide from God. God knows us through and through and the most **amazing** thing is this – if grace meets us anywhere, it meets us in our sin!

Notice in this story from Genesis we miss the fact that **grace** permeates this entire story. When suddenly, these two earth creatures find themselves exposed, they are worried about not having clothes, and God graciously says, “Well, let me take care of that; I’ll give you clothes, even though I made you to be naked.” That action of God in this story, just one of many other actions, is a clear statement of grace.

Yes, it is in the places of deepest struggle, pain, and alienation where grace meets us and where we discover the Good News that God loves us **no matter what** and that God works through our weakness. We do **not** have to hide from God for any reason. When grace meets us, we learn that God considers us to be a treasure, just as we are, and God works in our lives, even in our deep brokenness. That is the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul understood this so well. He had experienced this grace and God's power in his own life. Grace met him in the place of deepest sin and transformed his life. Paul understood that the destructiveness of human sin is resolved finally and only by acknowledging our human limitations, and by placing our **total** dependence upon the love and grace of God. In his second letter to the Christians who lived in Corinth, Paul says to his fellow disciples, "What we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise! So, we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace." (*The Message*; 2 Corinthians 4:14-16)

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus also addresses the destructiveness of human sin. The writer of Mark's version of the Jesus story asks us to take with utter seriousness the power of evil in this world and in life and then, along with all those who **do the will of God**, trust in the power of God that **Jesus** so fully embodies. And, the power of God is always, always shown through inclusive, healing love and unfathomable grace, often at those times when we think we least deserve it.

The Good News is that ours is a God who, no matter where we wander or try and hide, already sees us, and lovingly pursues us. And, God will take every detail in our life and work through it, using it to our advantage for our good. We do not have to hide because of who we are or what we have done. God loves us, and God has **already** found us.

So, while we tend to be so like my middle son and try to hide if we have done something wrong, God will always pursue us to shower us with grace. While we may **think** we are hiding, our gracious God already knows where we are while lovingly calling out to us asking, "Where are you?" And, this God of grace upon grace, this God of grace and more grace, is always inviting us back to God's very self. May we eagerly listen to God's call and joyfully respond because, the truth is, in Jesus we have already **been** found by this God of grace.