

Hide and Seek

Text: Genesis 3:8-15

Hymn: "A Mighty Fortress" (*LSB* 656)

This morning's text puts me in mind of an Internet slide show I clicked on a while ago. It was called something like, "Hiding Fails That Will Make You Laugh." People and animals trying to hide but not doing a very good job of it. Young children hiding behind the curtains, with the entire bottom half of their bodies in plain sight. A dog with its head stuck under a pillow but its whole tail sticking out. A cat sitting as still as possible behind the leg of a table that is two inches wide; one problem—the cat's about eight inches wide, which meant a lot of Whiskers was sticking out. Hiding fails.

Of course, we get our Old Testament reading today in words, no pictures. But if by chance there had been a gorilla in the Garden of Eden who had stumbled upon an iPhone and snapped some shots of the scene. They could have made it into that collection of "Worst Hiding Fails," eliciting some chuckles along with the others.

Maybe you didn't catch it. "And they"—Adam and Eve—"heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees in the Garden." Now there may have been some really big trees in the Garden of Eden, and so the hiding fail isn't exactly the same as chubby Whiskers hiding behind the thin leg of the table, but it's still funny. Funny because we here are Adam and Eve trying to hide themselves in the garden from the very guy—the very God!— who made the whole thing! You can imagine Adam and Eve saying to one another, "Maybe if we remain really still, God will forget He made us."

There is a small detail in the text that may point to the fact that they weren't hiding very well. We are told in the next line that "the LORD God called to the man." He didn't call in general, "Where are you?" but He called *to the man*. I picture the owner looking right at Whiskers behind that table leg and rubbing his chin and saying, "I wonder where Whiskers is"—God looking right at Adam and saying, "I wonder where Adam is."

There's a lot of humor in the Bible, and maybe this is some of the first. But, alas, it's not funny for very long. It's funny until you realize that the folks hiding from the Lord would only recently have been running to greet Him. Then funny turns sad. You can imagine a father, who is accustomed to coming home from a long day's work and having his two children fall on either leg in affection, then to come home one day and find his children not only not there but hiding. And they are not hiding in some fun game but hiding in fear. Imagine the father's heartbreak. "Oh, no! What has gotten into the hearts and minds of my children that they don't run to me but hide from me! Oh, no, my beautiful children!"

The funny wears off quickly when you realize what is actually going on and even more quickly when you realize the story is ultimately about you and me. That's the way Scripture works. It's a record of things that happened. It gives us an historical account of the Fall. But just as significantly, these stories are for us to see ourselves in them, to hear this and say, "That's me! I am the one hiding." That's you and me with the fig leaves covering up our shameful parts, trying our darndest to stay still and not get seen.

And why? Why are we hiding? What are we hiding from? That's the kind of question that a story like this should have us asking. I should point out, too, that it's not

just God they're hiding from. They're hiding from one another. In the verse just before this we're told that Adam and Eve made fig leaves. The first thing they do once they've turned from God, and doubted his promise, and disobeyed His Word, convinced by the serpent that God is keeping something from them, they make fig leaves to cover themselves up. That is, they hide themselves from one another.

Back at the end of chapter 1 we're told that after God had created them they "were both naked and not ashamed." But now they are ashamed. Now there's distance between them. Soon they'll be blaming one another for what happened. But I can't help but think that just like us, behind the blame (which we do a whole lot of) is the shame they feel—we feel—for having let one another down.

This story is ancient history. But it's also our story. The profound insight is that the first fruit of our broken relationship with God is that we hide. We hide from Him and we hide from one another. We hide our weakness and go around pretending we are all doing much better than we actually are. Often times we hide that stuff even from ourselves. We can see our deepest shames so much, that the mere thought of them spilling out makes our heart rate tick up and has us turning to whatever we can to fashion into so many fig leaves.

Two weeks ago we heard the parable Jesus told on the same day that his family was going to stage some kind of intervention, "for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:21). They had to get in there. I wonder if part of the reason they wanted to put a stop to what Jesus is up to was the fact Jesus knew the family secrets, the shameful stuff. They thought it was only a matter of time before He spilled their beans the way He'd been spilling the beans of everybody else. For them it's worse than

having a pastor for a dad: “Please, Dad, don’t tell that story. Even if it’s not about us, people are going to think it is.”

We all hide something. Dr. Paul Zahl, an Anglican priest and the author of a very good book, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*, contends that everyone has one thing that they think about every day. For some people, it’s something they think about all day—some shame, some guilt, some regret, some wound—always there, but hidden. No one else knows. Hidden because terrified of what would happen if unhidden—laughed at, expelled, pitied, thought weak. Everyone has one thing. What’s your one thing?

And the LORD God said to the man, “Where are you?” Such a powerful phrase. Where are you? An Old Testament professor of mine liked to point out that the original Hebrew is as follows (you may even recognize it). *Ali, ali, achsen frih*. Just kidding. It’s obviously not. But that’s how you should hear your Creator’s “Where are you?” As one big “Olly, Olly, Oxen Free!” The phrase you say at the end of a game of hide and seek or capture the flag or kick the can when all those still hiding can come out in the open. What does it mean? A guy named Oliver gets free cattle? It makes no sense until you realize it’s a corruption of the original, something like “All ye, all ye, in come free!”

“All ye, all ye, in come free!” To all of us hidiers God’s first words after we turn and hide. Some people like to point to Genesis 3:15 and the promise that the seed of the woman—ultimately Jesus—would crush the head of the serpent, the one who lied to us and continues to lie to us, trying to convince us that God is against us and trying to keep things from us, that that promise of the serpent’s head being crushed is the first Gospel, the *Protoeuangelion*. But for the first Gospel maybe we should back up a few

verses to the Lord God saying to the man, “Where are you?” Where are you, not because I don’t know where you are. He knows exactly where Adam is. He knows exactly what he did. He knows exactly where you are. He knows especially your one thing. But “where are you?” because I need you to know that you don’t need to hide from me. I come *seeking* you. You think you need to hide from me, because you think if I found out what you did, your one thing, I would destroy you or mock you or write you off. But you are wrong. I seek you not to find out what you did so I can punish, but so I can tell you I know all that you did and yet still it will not separate you from me.

All ye, all ye, in come free! That’s the first Gospel. That’s the first good news in the Bible. In one sense, it’s the only Gospel. The good news, which is the whole point of the whole story of God with His creation that we hear in Scripture—man turning away over and over again, men and women hiding from one another, hiding from God because of all the shame and guilt—which is *real* shame and guilt, we are not innocent!—men and women hiding from God and one another and then the God who says over and over and in many and various ways, “Where are you?” He’s saying it right now, not because He doesn’t know where you are. He knows exactly where you are. He knows every hair on your head, every shame on your soul, every sin on your conscience. “Where are you?” He says to all of us hiding our nakedness. He says it over and over again. He says it most loudly when He Himself, stripped naked on the Cross, gathers up all my shames and all your guilts and all the stuff we hide and hide from, takes all the accusations of the old foe who’s always telling us we need to hide, and He crushes him and He crushes it, all under His bruised heel and wounded body.

“Where are you?” “All ye, all ye, in come free!” He calls out, “You’re my children! Your sins are forgiven! My body and blood given for you!” over and over and over again, because your God will not rest until instead of fleeing from him and one another we run to Him together, like children falling on their father’s legs.

All ye, all ye, in come free!

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