

Sermon – June 14, 2020
“I Hid Myself”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Genesis 3:1-19

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Amen

I would like to remind us, or inform those who haven't heard, that this summer I am preaching a series of sermons from the Old Testament. We will journey from Genesis to Exodus, covering great leaps of time while making key stops in the developments of the story of God's people. As we journey, it is my hope and earnest prayer that we will meet some of the people of the Old Testament in new ways and experience fresh insights about the people God chose as His people. I hope that you will begin to identify with their gifts, their successes, and their failures. I hope that we are able to encounter God in His Word and see His truth with fresh eyes. I hope that as we journey, the stories of the people we meet will not be just their story, but will become our story. A story about a people seeking to enter into God's mission. A story we as followers of Christ enter into, become part of, and are seeking to share with others.

Last week, we began our journey with God creating the heavens and the earth. Many thanks to Judy and Alf who did a great job last week filling in while I was ill. I hope that you were able to hear them and to begin to meet a God who creates and sustains us. Our God is not a distant, far-off God, but a close and present God. Our God steadfastly loves humanity, those created in His image, the image of God, the imago Dei. Some of the take-aways I hope you discovered last week might include the following: God creating humanity in His image as male and female. God is without a concept of sexuality but His creation are sexual creatures. The first man is Adam and his helpmeet is Eve. God placed them in a beautiful garden and gave them a mission to be fruitful, multiply, and to fill the earth with images of God. God also gave them work to do, to name the animals, which is a step towards dominion over them, and to tend and till the Garden of God, Eden. And God gave them a command to obey. They were not to eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden. God was in relationship with them, coming to them in the time of the evening breeze. God was present with creation, walking with them, talking with

them, teaching them, nurturing them, and providing for them. They lived in a perfect, complete relationship with God. And God saw all that He created and said it was very good.

While it would be our desire to tarry in the Garden and be in relationship with God, our story moves on and too soon we find a new chapter of our journey opened. Let me tell some of today's story in my own words. Adam and Eve are together in the Garden of Eden. They are at work, tending the Garden, enjoying God's creation and God as they begin to grow in a relationship with God. And then one day they encounter the serpent. This serpent speaks to them and they don't seem to be startled by a talking serpent. Maybe everything in the Garden is new to them or maybe they have had conversations before, we don't know. On this day the serpent is speaking to both of those present, (we know this because all of the pronouns are plural,) but Eve is the one who answers his question. Now the way we normally read the serpent's words is as a question. In reality we should read this first question as more of an outlandish statement, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" It is not a question but more of a statement that is meant to get a response from Eve. The serpent seems to claim that God does not allow them to eat of any of the trees of the Garden. Eve decides to answer the serpent, and so she begins the first discussion with anyone about God. Eve is the first theologian, the first to talk not to God but to another about God. As her dialogue about God moves forward with the serpent, the tempter steers the conversation to what God is withholding from them, the fruit from this one tree in the middle of the Garden. It is not long into this discussion before the crafty serpent has Eve convinced that not only is God holding back something good that she and Adam deserve and should have, but that they will not immediately die if they eat this forbidden fruit. Once these ideas take place in her mind and she sees that the tree is beautiful to look upon, that its fruit is good for food, and that it is to be desired to make one wise, the temptation becomes action and Eve sends her hand, takes some fruit, eats, gives some fruit to Adam who is there with her, and he also eats. Temptation has now become sin. God's only command to them is now broken. Their eyes are opened and they realize that they are naked. Innocence is lost. They make clothes for themselves out of fig leaves, and when they hear God coming to them in the time of the evening breeze, they hide. They have fear. Knowledge brings many new aspects of life into the Garden; one is fear of God.

I am surprised that the serpent does not exit while they are occupied making their clothing, but I guess the serpent was very satisfied with what it has done and stays around to see how this turns out when God shows up. The serpent may be crafty, but not so wise?

While God may be greatly disappointed with his creation's action, He does not attack them. Instead, He asks questions when He arrives on this scene such as, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" God needs no information, but with compassion gives His creation a chance to come clean about their recent activity. Fear is too much, and first Adam blames his wife, the woman that God gave him, and then Eve blames the serpent, who has no one to blame and whom God does not ask for information. The consequences of their action are immediate. Their relationship with God is broken. Cursed is the soil for Adam and he will toil at it for food all of his life. Eve will have pain in childbirth and will seek after her husband all of her life. The serpent will now crawl on the ground on its belly. And death, a return to dust from which they came, is now their end. As the serpent implied, death is not immediate, but it does come as a consequence of the sin. All of creation is cursed in this moment and that which was created very good has broken with its creator and now groans for a return to its created state.

This is "The Fall." Humankind and all of creation with them has "fallen" from the presence of God. This is original sin. This is the point where sin nature enters into humankind and becomes part of all of our nature. No one needs to teach children to focus on themselves. They arrive with that selfish sin nature within them. That which was once seen by God as very good is now cursed and separated from God.

Throughout the history of Israel and the Church, this event, this moment in time when sin enters into our human nature, has always been seen as the most grievous moment of human history. Here was lost that which we cannot regain, a perfect relationship with a holy God. This is the answer to why bad things happen to good people, and bad people as well. This is the answer to why evil is present in our lives. We reached and continue to reach for what God is not yet ready to give us, in our own strength and power, in our time, in our will. Adam and Eve take what is good (knowledge of good and evil) and get it for themselves outside of God's will. The fruit of this tree is not something that God had planned to withhold from humanity, its presence in the Garden testifies to that, but humanity was to wait until God's timing to receive this gift. Instead, we put ourselves in God's place, and when we see something beautiful that is perceived to be good for us and desirable, we take it for ourselves. That which God will give in His time we think we must have when we want it, and we selfishly take that which we are not yet able to receive or keep.

God still loves humanity. God's steadfast love does not end. Our ability to receive love from a holy God is now limited, not by God, but by our sinful nature. We see that in God's punishment, God does not remove Adam and Eve from earth, but separates from them and all humanity. This separation is not because He does not love us, but because we cannot be in His presence in our sinful state. If we were to be in God's presence, we would experience His wrath. The wrath of God is defined as coming into the presence of a holy God unprepared. That is now our condition. We are those who are unprepared to enter into the presence of a holy God. God's mission to fill the earth with little images of God is now in danger as a result of the actions of sinful humanity. But God is not done, and from the ashes, God seeks and is able to bring beauty. God's original plan for humanity is now broken and in danger of failing. The serpent appears to have been the winner and humanity is lost, separated from the creator and sustainer of life.

Interesting to me is that today's culture has begun to look at this story and rearrange how it is heard and understood. The serpent is becoming the hero. His keen insight and ability to steer Eve are seen as actions that set free Adam and Eve, releasing them from bondage to God who keeps good things from them. The serpent is not seen as a deceiver, but as one who steers them to be free of a demanding relationship with God. They are free to make their own decisions, to define their own truth, and to live out the consequences of their decisions. They think they are free to live out their lives separated from the creator and sustainer of life, and this is seen as a good result of the serpent's actions. Those who retell this story in such a manner try to make that which is not true, truth, but it does not change the brokenness and consequences of that brokenness. Evil is now loose among us and we do not have to look far to find its effects. Evil in a person leads them to murder another. Evil rises up in violent riots. Evil seeks to make the gifts of marriage a right to be enjoyed by the cultural definition and not a relationship blessed by God. Humanity's demand for its wants are to be met now, and we refuse to wait upon God to provide in His time and in His will. These actions continue to separate us from our creator and sustainer. The results of our sinful desires are brokenness and continued separation from God, yet we ask why God allows evil to occur in the midst of our lives, even when we, through our decisions, are its source.

But God is still creator and sustainer, even if we will not acknowledge that we need to be in relationship with the one whose image we bear. God seeks always to bring good out of our evil intentions and actions. Our pathway is now a pathway through brokenness. Yet God begins to make a way for humanity to return to relationship with Him. This is the story that we are

encountering in the Bible, seen in the life of Christ and his death on a cross that we might have our sin debt paid and we might through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, be reconciled to God. This story winds across the ages. It is woven into the lives of God's chosen people, a people selected to be those through whom a blessing will come to all people of the earth. It is the story we will look at this summer as God interacts with people to move from a fallen creation separated from God, to a new creation reconciled to God through Christ. Humanity still has this sin nature, a desire for the good things of God and seeks to take them for ourselves, before we are ready, before God wills that we should have them. Adam's sin is our sin. We need a savior.

It will not require much reflection to identify moments in our lives when we also, like Adam and Eve, have taken that which was not for us to take in the midst of our desire. Let me encourage each of us to spend some time in reflection on our lives and let God touch those things that we need to address. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Our best works are but filthy rags. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to how we have been those who have taken and continue to take that which is not ours to satisfy our desires. As our eyes are opened, let us remember that we have an advocate, one who takes away our sins and makes us whole. The wages of sin is death, Adam and Eve lived in relationship with God, but broke that very good relationship, and with that breaking, death enters into their lives and the lives of all humanity. Christ through his death on the cross for all of humanity brings to fulfillment God's plan to bring humanity back to relationship with Him, through belief in Jesus. Repentance, followed by sanctification, becomes our lifelong journey until we are completely sanctified and restored to a right relationship with God. There is a way for us to be restored to God. That Way is the good news of Jesus Christ, our message to all people of the earth, our reconnection to God's mission, God's will for His people.

Pray with me: Father God, help us to journey with you through the struggles and success, the failure and pain of your people. Use this time to open our eyes to areas of our lives that we need to place before you again or for the first time. Lead us to repentance, lead us to forgiveness, lead us into a deep restored relationship with you. In Jesus' name, the name above all names, we pray. Amen.