

Hide and Seek

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] It's my privilege to speak to you for just a few moments. The Bible readings and the hymns and the carols that are sung by the choir are traditional and deep and lovely.

They're like springs of waters that all flow toward the person and the birth of Jesus Christ. And they begin, as you remember, in the book of Genesis, chapter 3, where we have the first hide and seek in the Bible.

And we also have the first promise of the birth of the child of God. Man and woman are hiding. God is seeking. And we cannot understand ourselves.

We cannot understand our world or even our feelings, let alone the coming of Christ, apart from this passage. So I have two points.

The first one is hiding. The second one is seeking. Firstly, who is hiding and why? That Genesis 3 passage begins with one man and one woman in fig leaves.

[1 : 11] And we read, They heard the sound of the Lord God, literally the voice of the Lord God, in the garden, in the cool of the day, in the ruach, the spirit of the day.

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. It's very strange that they are in fig leaves. I'm not talking about the itchiness.

This is the first couple. And God had created them perfect in a perfect world, placed them in a garden, given them everything they needed, and bound them together with joy.

And seven verses before, at the end of the second chapter, we read this. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. It's a picture of complete openness and trust and transparency.

And the fact that they had no shame means there is a total unity between what's going on inside them and what's going on outside them.

[2 : 19] There's a transparency of soul. There's an inner purity and honor that matches the external reality. There is no instinct to hide whatsoever.

And something drastic has happened. In seven short verses, everything has changed. Now they feel shame and fear and distrust for each other.

And they're wearing fig leaves in the futile attempt to cover themselves and to change themselves, to heal themselves from this feeling inside. Worse than that, they instinctively feel like they need to hide from God.

The one who made them, who gave them to each other and gave them everything. And part of the genius, I think, of this little narrative in Genesis is it explains why we hide from God and from each other, where fear and shame come from, and what the consequences are of trying to play God.

The figure of Satan is seen in the shape of a serpent. And he suggests to Adam and Eve that they can't really trust God. That God's words limit their freedom, their creativity, and their identity.

[3 : 32] And they'd be much better off making their own moral choices, leaving behind what God says. And the only consequence is that they're going to be free. But the instant they try to play God, there is a breach.

The breach is inside them, within themselves, and with each other, and between them and God.

And the unity and vulnerability that they had within themselves and between each other and with God is replaced with fear and hiding precisely because they tried to replace God.

And the very sentence that comes just before our passage says this. This is as soon as they disobey God, the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

It is a change at the level of the soul. Nothing has changed about their bodies. But now they recoil from each other, insecure, anxious, guilty, ashamed, just as we do.

And it's a change inside them, you see. This alienation between their outer bodies and their inner sense of themselves is the first thing that happens. And all the fig leaves in the world cannot heal this sense of division and this sense of anxiety because it has a spiritual root, its alienation from God himself.

[5 : 02] They thought they were throwing off what God had said. They thought that would make them flourish and enable them to have whatever they wanted, just as we attempted to think a thousand times a day.

But the opposite happens. Their perception is twisted, and they delude themselves. Instantly they feel they are unprotected and defenseless against each other, and they need fig leaves to hide. And things only get worse when God comes into the garden. They hear the voice of the Lord born to them on the spirit of God at the end of the day. And they recognize how ridiculous it is to try and hide from God in their fig leaves.

So they develop a new strategy, just as we've developed millions of strategies. Now they hide from God quite brilliantly behind a tree. But it's only when they hear the voice of God, you see, they realize the inadequacy of the fig leaf strategy.

That they've tried to play God. That they've imagined that freedom is found in leaving God behind. That, you know, I'll be wiser if I make my own rules and decisions. The voice of God comes, and we hide.

[6 : 14] And we still do. And still the voice of God comes. But now it calls the man. And for the first time in the Bible, and for the first time in human experience, there is fear.

The Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid.

Because I was naked and I hid myself. He's truthful about what he's feeling, but he hides the real reason. And when God asks him directly whether he's eaten from the tree, Adam now develops a new strategy which we have perfected today with daily use.

He throws his wife under the bus. He plays the victim. And he turns his shame into blame. He even blames God himself. He says, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate.

This is our default strategy to offload shame. This is the way we try and hide from God. We distort the truth about ourselves and about others, and we play the victim.

[7 : 24] You can hear it in Adam. I didn't really want to do it. I'm a good person. I'm a good person. The woman did it. If there's anyone to blame, it's her. And really, God, who gave her to me?

You're the one who gave me the woman. We'd never be in this mess if you'd never given her to me in the first place. I'm only really wearing these silly leaves because of her. It's a lie.

And it's a cruel distortion. Instead of taking responsibility and telling the truth that he's willingly sinned, Adam plays the victim card. He justifies himself, and he weaponizes the victim card by blaming her and God.

And God asks Eve, is this true? And she follows Adam's example, and she blames the snake. She shifts the blame away from herself to the snake, thinking it will exonerate her.

It's not my fault, she says. That's just how guilt and shame work. We hide from ourselves, and we hide from each other, and we hide from God.

[8 : 31] And we're afraid of his voice and being exposed. And when there's a danger of our truth being told of, you know, God is approaching, we resort to self-justification, to cover our fig leaves by finding someone else to blame.

We even blasphemously blame God himself. And this so permeates our lives, it's almost impossible to spot it in ourselves. I see it in other people around me. We've walked away from God, we've tried to play God.

We try to hide from ourselves, we try to hide from each other and God. We cobble together these corrupt strategies of defense. And all along, we have not healed the underlying alienation from God. This is now what it means to be human. We begin by hiding, and the more we hide, we end up lost. Lost from ourselves, lost from each other, and lost from God.

And at the end of Eve's attempt to throw off blame, you feel like what is needed is for God to start again. We need a humanity 2.0. A new human who's going to cover our shame and take it away, and who can deal with the snake and our sin and reconcile us to God and to each other.

[9 : 53] So I turn from point number one, hiding, to point number two, seeking. Because the truly remarkable thing in this passage and in the garden is that God doesn't give up on humanity 1.0.

Despite the fact that man and woman no longer desire God, they no longer love him naturally, and they blame him for the mess, God comes and he seeks and he seeks and he seeks.

As they hide behind the tree and their useless fig leaves, without any desire for God, God comes and he calls them. He knows they're hiding, but he still calls. And this is how God comes to all of us. He comes by his word. And he asks them these very simple questions. Where? Who? What? He wants them to take responsibility. He will not judge before he knows all the facts.

And here is the thing. God does not hide from us. We hide from him. Some people think God is hard to find, and we have to go through all sorts of exercises to get to him.

[11 : 01] But it's not we who are seeking him. It's he who is seeking us. God pursues. God seeks us. It's not Adam and Eve who seek for God. It's God who seeks for them.

They don't call out for God. It's God who calls to them. They don't come to find God. It's God who comes to find them. They don't try and draw near and heal the breach between them.

That's what God does. They don't come and ask him questions. That's what God does. They take no initiative toward him. The initiative is all on God's side.

Seeking, seeking, seeking. And he makes a way by coming to us. And it shows the incredibly high value God places on man and woman. His plan, as we'll just see in a moment, is to save them at terrible personal cost.

And so here in the garden, we get the first promise of Christ our Savior. It comes in the sentence that God passes on the serpent.

[12 : 04] God speaks of a new order of the universe. Before he has words for the man and the woman about their responsibility, he limits the evil of Satan by passing sentence, and he promises to make an end of all evil.

I remind you of verse 15. God says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring.

He, singular, shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. It's the first prophecy in Scripture.

God is the first prophet in the Bible. And he promises the coming of Christ. The good news of the coming of Jesus is here in the Garden of Eden, spoken by the Creator himself.

God says to the serpent, and he says it to the serpent, so that Adam and Eve can overhear it. But he doesn't say it directly to them, because while it is the answer to their need, there's something more important going on.

[13 : 07] God must reestablish his own rule, his godness. He has to now redeem all of creation from this evil, so that our individual redemption is part of a greater work.

And what he promises is conflict. And he promises the gift of a champion. He says, I will deal with Satan and with death and with evil and with sin through one offspring of the woman, which is a special tenderness to her.

He, singular, shall bruise your head, Satan, and you shall bruise his heel. He says there are two humanities now, and from one of those humanities will come one offspring, one particular boy child, who will ultimately win the victory over Satan at the cost of his own life.

And this word bruise, it's a much stronger word. It's a word for shatter, or break, or crush. God promises a child will come who will crush a cranium of the snake.

There will be an utter defeat, and he will destroy Satan and evil and all his lies under his feet. But in so doing, the boy's savior will be fatally wounded.

[14 : 27] The very heel that he uses to stamp on Satan's head will be crushed. It's the same word. But through that death, he will gain the victory. What that means is this, that salvation comes through judgment.

Judgment on Satan and judgment on the offspring child. So that God finds a way to be just and merciful and at the same time, a way for humanity to be saved.

And it also means this, that the trajectory of history and the trajectory of the Bible is toward victory. Yes, there's suffering.

Yes, there's judgment. But the great reality is salvation and redemption through one of Eve's children. And from this point on in the Bible, everyone is looking for this child.

One who will come, one who will be able to deal with our shame and our guilt and our distortion and our blame and all the terrible evil that afflicts us and we afflict each other with.

[15 : 30] You know, we come to Noah. It's not him. He has his own shame. We come to Abraham and Moses and to David. And they're all looking for this one as well. And again and again, God renews his promise.

We've heard it half a dozen times tonight. And in Isaiah, we hear God prophesy of a man of sorrows who's coming. He was pierced, this man of sorrows, for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities.

We like sheep have gone astray, turned everyone to his own way, but the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. And while all the world waits, Mary has a boy child.

And the angel says, you shall call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Emmanuel, which means God with us. And the boy grows to be a man and lives a life which is utterly blameless, spotless, generous, transparent, the one person who has no need to be ashamed.

And he says in his ministry, I've come to seek and to save the lost, to take our fear and our guilt and our blame onto himself.

[16 : 43] And on the cross, he's separated and he is alienated from God so that we might be brought back, reconciled, healed, forgiven. And that's what this service is about tonight.

That's all the readings and all the singing and all the praying it's about tonight. It's the truly astonishing good news that God has remembered his promise from the garden.

He has sent his son, born as one of us, to bring us back to God. So I say to you, don't hide from him. Hide in him.

He will bring you back to God. He will bring you to yourself and to others. And the way that you hide yourself in him is to clothe yourself with him, to put him on.

So long as you remain outside him, you still are lost. We pray a prayer during this season in the Anglican Church that we would cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

[17 : 45] The armor of light is Christ. So clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

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