

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves (Genesis 3:8). In the name of God. Amen.

I.

Hide and Seek.¹

Who can't remember the fun of playing "hide and seek?" Being tagged "it" and having to close your eyes and count to 10 while everyone else hid. Kids yelling out, "Don't peek!" "I can see you!" "Close your eyes!" "Ready or not, here I come!" "Olly olly oxen free, which is most likely a garbled version of "All ye all ye outs in free." Everyone racing to home base to avoid being tagged "it."²

Especially fun was when my children were young and would play in the house and hide in places that were so obvious that I had to laugh out loud. One of them would pass me and whisper, "Don't tell?" as they scooted under the bed or behind a closet door. Or how about, "it" yelling, "Where are you?" not caring who answered just as long as someone did and they could tag the next person "it." Three year olds probably shouldn't play because you can often hear the response, "I'm here!"

The game is an example of an oral tradition, as it is commonly passed down by children. Another oral tradition, of course, are the bible stories that were handed down before being put in written form. The heart of the primary creation story about Adam and Eve, for example, is a particularly beautiful story from the Judeo-Christian tradition that tells how the earth and human beings came into being. Our scripture from Genesis today tells us how, "the man and his wife hid themselves from God among the trees" . . . and God calls out, "Where are you?"

II.

When Adam and Eve are not content with who they are in relationship with God; they want to be God.³ So, because of their breach in the relationship with God by failing to obey God's command not to eat of the tree of knowledge in the garden, they are escorted to a new home outside the gates of Eden's garden. That transition continues even today.

This morning, we revisit the creation story of the fall by imagining God walking in the garden during the cool of early evening, as usual, to visit friends – the down to earth imagery, is among the Bible's most poignant anthropomorphism (anthropomorphisms) - relating human characteristics to God. A gentle breeze is brushing the bushes and trees, the flowers and lush landscape. The way the story is written, we might imagine that God taking a walk right after supper is part of God's regular routine.

The God of the written word is silent – trapped on a page, read quietly in studies and in offices, on desks and kitchen tables, maybe even – in a sermon. Conversely, there is great possibility in imagining the sounds of God. What do you suppose God walking in the garden sound like?

A rustling of leaves, the snapping of twigs, the swishing of tall grass? Sandals touching the earth, perhaps, or bare feet? What, indeed, does God sound like? A baby's cry, a voice in song, (male and female), thunder, the roar of a lion, someone's grandmother, the ocean? In what ways do you hear the sound of God in the world?

¹ The Rev. Susan Bruttell. Quiet Days\Lent.2016.QuietDay\2016.QuietDay.Feb6.

² Joseph Nassal. *Rest Stops for the Soul*. Forest: Leavenworth, 1998. 83-86.

³ Bert Marshall. *Feasting on the Word. Year B. Volume 3*. "Proper 5 (Sunday Between June 5 and June 11 inclusive).. A Homiletical Perspective." (Louisville, Westminster, 2011) 99-103.

On these walks in the early evening, God is accustomed to bumping into the woman and the man God created to share this sacred space. Having encountered the *crafty* or in Hebrew, *arum*, (not evil) serpent, the man and the woman now encounter, for the first time together, their Maker. On this particular night, Eve and Adam do what many of us ordinary mortals would do: they hide.

In fact, they hide so well that this God does not seem to be able to find them and has to call out: “Where are you?” Having hidden well enough to escape divine detection, Adam makes the first of several critical mistakes – and gives away their hiding place by responding aloud. “I heard the sound of you walking in the garden and I was afraid, because I am *naked* or in Hebrew, *arom*, and I hid myself” (Genesis 3.10). “Who told you,” God asks, “that you are naked?” Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?

Without missing a beat, Adam blunders: “The woman whom **YOU** gave me, she gave me the fruit from the tree and I ate.” Adam not only sets the blame game in motion, he turns it into a theodicy issue: he blames God! This part of the creation story is a prime example of biblical humor – in particular, the punning wordplay in Hebrew: *arum* “crafty” and *arom* “naked.” One has to wonder what would have happened if Adam had remained silent.

III.

This scenario also calls into question God’s divine omniscience versus human free will; that is, does God really not know where the humans are hiding themselves or is God just testing them? Does God not know that the humans have encountered the serpent and eaten from the tree? How are our perceptions of God affected by this? Are our lives fixed and known, or are we truly free beings whose thoughts and actions unfold in their own moments – awaiting the response of a God who chooses not to know from the very beginning?

One might also ask what would have become of humanity if Eve had not plucked the fruit from the tree. Everything hinges on this and our text today hinges on the chaos that ensues from ... Eve’s act of courage (or defiance – however you wish to characterize it). Everything turns on this because without it, humanity remains docile, numb, obedient and forever trapped in the garden of sameness and blissful ignorance. The garden, as it turns out, is no paradise. No differences, no opposites, no innovation, no creativity, no diversity, no rebellion, no need for grace or redemption. You can see where this path leads.

Obviously, there are no real answers. Only the most tantalizing questions. To hear this story as a literal historical account is to trivialize it beyond recognition, to deny its depth, and power and truth, to confine it to the realm of silliness or a silly childhood game like hide and seek.

God and the serpent, woman and man, garden and wilderness, blessing and curse – these are the elements of our existence and the objects of our lifelong quest for understanding and enlightenment. In any case, Eve and Adam hear the divine footsteps in the garden and hide in the bushes. In doing so, they invent the ancient ritual game of “hide and seek.” We’ve been playing that game with God every since.

Since God, the Divine Being, not yet familiar with this game of hide and seek created by the human beings – or playing along – God asks the obvious question of Adam and Eve: “Where are you?” Please note that it is God’s question, not our question. Yet, how often have we asked the same question of God? “Where are you?”

In my years as a priest and pastoral care giver, I have heard that cry many times – from people whose hearts are broken; whose hope has evaporated in the burning anguish of adversity, people who wonder where God is. Where God gone has gone? They would whisper, “Where is God?”

IV.

Haven’t we all, at one time or another in our lives, when pain has become so intense, when the loss has become so

immense, when the suffering has been more than we could bear, haven't we sensed that question forming deep in our souls and coming forth like a sigh: "Where are you?"

We go looking for God as if God has finally learned how to play the game of hide and seek. Except now, God is the one who is hiding and we are the ones who are seeking. We run off in search of God's hiding place. When we do, we fail to see that the answer to the question "Where are you?" is right before our eyes:

God is walking in the garden in the cool of an evening.

God is playing with our children in the backyard.

God is sitting with a dying friend in the hospital.

God is walking along an inner city street picking up pieces of broken glass.

God is putting in late hours behind a desk or working over time on a factory assembly line or out in a field trying to get the crops in before the storm comes.

God is sitting in silence on a prayer rug, or sitting in the living room curled up with a good book, or sitting on the porch sipping ice tea and swapping stories with a neighbor, or sitting in the back of a darkened church, or sleeping behind our columbarium altar using a backpack for a pillow long after everyone else has gone home, counting God's losses.

We ask of God, "Where are you?" And the answer is: God is in the mundane and the remarkable, in the anguish and the joy. God is in the details and the dramatic, in the brush strokes of another's hand wiping a tear from a friend's eyes and in the broad strokes of the red sky at dusk.

Yet still we ask, when the push of pain becomes a shove of suffering: "Where are you?"

And God replies, "I asked you first!"

It is, after all, God's question not ours.

"Where are you?" *Amen.*