

Naked and Afraid

The story goes that the preacher was invited for dinner and she showed up at little early at her congregant's front porch and heard the television running and knocked on the door. No answer. Worried that something might be askance, she tooled around to the back door of the house, past the family's garden and knocked again. No answer. Becoming irritated, she took out her calling card and left it by the door with the note, *Revelation 3:20*. A few minutes later the congregation member answered the door, found the note and looked up the verse to find, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

Embarrassed at having missed her, he quickly jotted off a note and slipped in the mail to the church. It read simply, "Genesis 3:10."

When the preacher received the note, she quickly opened her bible to read, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

This little joke hearkens back to a time when public nudity was generally frowned upon. Now, of course, there's naked gardening day, naked bike ride day... one wonders if anyone cares about such things anymore.

Except there is that common nightmare... You know the one I'm talking about... I ran a quick search this week to find out what the nightmare about being naked in public is about. Now mind you, this is unscientific, but I read that four out of five people have the nightmare of being naked in public at some point in their lives. I looked at several websites about dreams, and they offered such explanations as poor body image, fear of being judged, fear of being exposed – the possibilities of what causes us to have such nightmares seemed to be quite a long list. But apparently a lot of people have that dream.

Maybe you also have this one - I still have a recurring dream that the opening hymn is almost over and I can't quite get the microphone wires through my robe - well, I guess most of you don't. I'm just sure it points to some insecurity of my own, which of course, most dreams do, which of course that Genesis passage today does as well.

To the casual glance, it looks like *the* cataclysm of the Bible. All that is perfect is shattered, and God, in a rage, banishes the man and the woman from the garden forever. Certainly the narrative progression of the Bible suggests that this is case: we start with perfect creation, there is this spectacular "fall" following which we encounter stories of evil and torment, we get a brief lift, and a sustained hope in Jesus Christ, and then at the end of it all, Revelation sweeps onto the stage with its bloody moons and multi-headed dragons, beasts, virgins and infants, and the whole mess is swept off into a new heaven and new earth... it certainly *suggests* that

there is a progression of faith that mirrors the progression of the Bible, but that isn't necessarily so.

Walter Brueggemann writes, "The text is commonly treated as the account of '*the fall*,' Nothing could be more remote from the narrative itself. This is *one* story which needs to be set alongside many others in the Old Testament... the Genesis text makes no general claim about the human prospect. If one were to locate such a pessimistic view of human nature in the Old Testament, one might better look to the tradition of Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel than here."¹

In other words, *we* might call it *the fall*, but the Bible does not.

Frederick Buechner puts it even more succinctly when he writes, "The Biblical view of the history of humankind and each individual man or woman is contained in the first three chapters of Genesis. We are created to serve God by loving him and each other in freedom and joy, but invariably choose bondage and woe as prices not too high to pay for independence. To say that God drove Adam and Eve out of Eden is apparently a euphemism for saying that Adam and Eve, like the rest of us, made a break for it as soon as God happened to look the other way. If God really wanted to get rid of us, then chances are he wouldn't have kept hounding us every step of the way ever since."²

The Bible is not trying to tell us what bad people we are and how we got so bad, it is trying to present us with a *story*. One colleague of mine likes to call the whole of the Bible a *love letter*; God's mechanism of sharing the story of making a creation and falling so in love with it that God remains transfixed by the creation itself and unwilling to let it be spoiled.

If there is a deeper story of what we're getting wrong here, it's not that we're getting the rules wrong that God gave us but rather that we're getting *God* wrong.

Because here's a fundamental truth: if we get *God* wrong, it is almost impossible to get *ourselves* right because it is God who has made us and made us to be who we are.

That is why the text from Paul this morning, from his letter to the Corinthian church has such profound truth for us when he tells us that this *flesh* - really, this whole material world - is not illusory, not inferior, not bad, but only *temporary*.

Think of where we get the word temporary - it has to do with the temporal realm, wherein we live in *time*. But if the *eternal*, which is not temporary, which is not bound to particularities of fate and flesh and tense exists in God, then nothing can ever destroy it.

At times it appears that there are really two main ways to think of God and the world. One is where God resides in things, the stuff of creation. You've heard this one. It's where God's in the rocks and trees, etc. There are a lot of people who believe that, and it's easy to get from

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis in Interpretation*, Mays, Miller and Achtemeier, eds. (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1982) p41.

² Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC* (NY: HarperOne, 1993) p41

there to idolatry – if God is in the rock, then make the rock look nice and then you can attempt to derive some meaning from it. But the other way of thinking of how God relates to the world, and this is a teaching of Christian faith, is *not that God is in creation, but that creation exists inside the eternity of God.*

See the difference? The first way, God is sitting back watching the narrative. The second way, the narrative is taking place within the very heart of God, within the eternal care of God.

Paul is telling us that if we know our lives are taking place within the very being and heart of God, then things look different.

The problem with over-emphasizing *the fall*, with getting hung up on the sin that that destroys shalom, is that we have this nasty tendency to assume that temporal mistakes have eternal consequences. Get it right in this life, undo Adam and Eve for yourself, or else you have *Revelation* to look forward to.

Who wouldn't be anxiety-ridden at such a prospect!

Brueggemann is even more pointed when he puts it this way, "Perfect love casts out fear, but the man and the woman in our narrative learned another thing: perfect fear casts out love and leaves only desire... the story is a theological critique of anxiety. It presents a prism through which the root cause of anxiety can be understood. The man and the woman are controlled by their anxiety (3:1). They seek to escape anxiety by attempting to circumvent the reality of God, for the reality of God and the reality of anxiety are related to each other. Overcoming of God is thought to lead of the nullification of anxiety about self. But the story teaches otherwise. It is only God, the one who calls, permits, and prohibits who can deal with the anxiety among us."³

If this whole narrative is taking place within the eternity of God, however, then the Genesis story doesn't carry any more weight than Psalm 23, *The Lord is my shepherd*, or Isaiah 40, *Comfort, O comfort my people*, because all of it is taking place within the eternal redemption story of God.

And if it's an eternal redemption story, it's not about getting the rules right, but getting *God* right.

And when we get God right, when we understand that God isn't just waiting to play whack-a-mole with us for our sins, then we can begin to get *ourselves* right and *each other* right.

The point of Genesis 3 isn't that Adam and Eve got it wrong way back then and so we must pay, but rather that Adam and Eve are getting it wrong right now, or Stanley and Dorothy, or Homer and Marge, or Fred and Ethel are getting it wrong right now. The point isn't that Adam and Eve got it wrong, but that each of us gets it wrong some of the time and God doesn't give up on us.

³ Brueggemann, 53

In other words, we don't have to sit around naked and afraid of God. Instead, we can get up, get on with it, and realize that the lives we live, our anxieties and joys, are taking place within the eternity of God. The God *whose eye is on the sparrow* eternally watches over us.

Did you know that theologians have two ways of talking about time also? One is *Chronos* – you all know Chronos, it's the one where the clock ticks. The chronometer marks its progression. We live in Chronos. We mark the seasons of our lives with chronos.

But God's time is different, it's *Xairos*. It's eternal time, it's not marked by the passing of minutes, days, hours and lives, it's different. It's God's time.

And all of the Chronos, the good and anxious, joyful and sad, the stupid and wise things we do, are all resting within the *Xairos* of God. The worst thing you've ever done doesn't exist outside of the redemption of God, because everything exists within the eternity of God.

Now why I am rambling on and on about time and space? Because occasionally, perhaps when we've blundered and had our worst falls, the veil between Chronos and *Xairos* slips, and we see past the Chronos into the *Xairos* and we catch a glimpse of God's eternity. And one of the places where we can best hope to find a pocket of *Xairos* to carry into the rest of it all is in the cradle of Christian community, right here where Jesus, even still, calls us. Or maybe more accurately, where Jesus *eternally calls us*.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.