

Augusta First Baptist Church
Genesis 3:8-13
Where Are You?
January 7, 2007
When God Asks the Questions

8 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 from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:8-13).

“When God Asks the Questions,” that is our theme for the next few weeks. Usually, we are the ones asking the questions for God: “Why, God, what do you want me to do?” “Where do you want me to go?” and so forth. The Bible, however, from beginning to end is filled with the questions that God asks of real people, not much different from you and me. Every time God asks a question, you and I have an opportunity to respond in ways that can change our life, change our walk, and even change our world.

This story in Genesis is on the one hand quaint and approachable, even comical with all of the finger pointing. The man in the story, who at this point does not have a name, blames God for giving him the woman and then blames the woman. The woman, also not yet named, blames the serpent, and so on. In these six short verses, God is not just asking one question, but several: *Where are you... Who told you that you were naked... Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat... What is this that you have done?*

But it is that first question that gets my attention, “*Where are you?*” Now we can just imagine God knows good and well where the man and woman are. This is God we are talking about after all. Peel away the rhetoric, however, and we see the deeper layers behind the question.

Where are you?

It is the question a mother asks of her teenage daughter who one day was playing with dolls and the next is moody and brooding. *Where are you?*

It is the question an anxious husband asks of his wife when he feels the bonds of marriage disintegrating. *Where are you?*

It is the question, the one broken down by grief and in panic and sadness prays before God. *Where are you?*

Where are you? This kind of question is the kind of question wanting to know what you are hiding. We all have memories of childhood when we did something we were ashamed of or feared getting caught and quickly sought to hide the evidence. I have three other siblings and from the oldest to the youngest there is only five year’s difference in the age. Most of our childhood was spent hiding something. We would hide broken sheetrock when one of us “accidentally” made a hole, we would hide broken furniture when one of us “accidentally” brought damage, we would even hide pain if one of us “accidentally” fell out of a tree or got in a fight or held a firecracker too long. From hiding candy wrappers when we were children, to pretending we know nothing about the dent on the bumper of the borrowed car, we hide from those things that embarrass or make us ashamed.

You know what I think? We never outgrow this. We just become more sophisticated with what we are hiding and the masks we hide behind. To the one with low self-esteem, there is the need to prove something.

We see this all the time on the athletic field, academic field, or the business field. We hide behind alcohol and food. We hide behind political activism, and we hide behind religious zeal and fervency. As we get older, our hiding simply gets more complex.

Hiding— we can be pretty good at this. So good, in fact, that we sometimes hide from our real selves becoming so entangled in propped up images, that we no longer recognize who we are.

Let's consider God's question, "*Where are you?*" It isn't so much a question that God cannot find the man and woman, but a question directed to the ones who have lost their way from God. The man and woman began to listen to other voices to tell them their worth. Do you know what the serpent whispered? "*Not enough.*" Not good enough, not loved enough, not worth enough...have you ever heard this before? Four times in chapters two and three the man and woman are described as naked. This is not inconsequential. To be naked is the ultimate picture of contentment, but now their worth, their value will be determined by others. This drove them into hiding. It isn't just that the man and woman were hiding from God. When the man and the woman no longer believed that what they had was enough, they found themselves lost.

This is a story that repeats itself in the Bible. Jacob tricks his father and brother and loses himself in flight from his family. And then, there is Moses who kills an Egyptian and loses himself in the wilderness for years and years. What about poor old disciple Peter, who found himself denying Jesus not once but three times? Do you remember where he was following the resurrection? He and the other disciples were hiding behind locked doors, because they were afraid. Lost.

Anybody in here relate? Are there times when you feel that because of actions or attitudes you are now lost, separated, or hidden from God?

Here are some indicators that the man and woman were lost:

Failure to trust – this is the story we have here in Genesis in a nutshell. In the garden, God provided for all their needs, all they had to do was trust and know their boundaries. There are places you just cannot go. It appears to be a short-lived trust and they listened to other voices. Fear (*I was afraid*, v. 10) – When one loses trust, fear is simply around the corner. This is the same excuse lifted many times in the Bible.

Shame - They were hiding because of their shame and they could no longer stand themselves or stand to be around God. The first time we read about shame in the Bible is in the previous chapter (2:25). Before eating the fruit, the man and woman lived without shame. Now shame puts them in hiding. Shame will do that by the way. It will separate you from yourself, from the ones you love, and God.

What was the cause of their fear and failure and shame? Listen to the language in the story: "I heard...I was afraid...I was naked...I hid...I ate...*I, I, I...*" To the man and woman the focus shifted from trusting God to a narcissistic preoccupation of self.

Allow me another observation based on the text. The man and woman are hiding out of failure, fear and shame. They feel separated from God because of their actions. I ask you, *where is God in this story?* Is God presented as far removed, abiding from his celestial throne, holding court, and preparing for judgment? No. Instead, we read of God taking an evening stroll in the Garden.

Remember the old sentimental hymn (I can still hear my grandmother's warbling voice singing it in the kitchen): "*I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, And the voice I hear falling on my ear. The son of God discloses. And he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.*"

When we feel most estranged from God the text suggests that God is much closer than we think. Indeed, even in the disobedience of the man and woman God does not choose to walk elsewhere. Rather God seeks them out! Now that's good stuff, if you ask me.

We know God in relationship. It is not so much in the doctrines or the teachings of the church that we know God. Of course, I think theology is important. That is why, in part, I spent some of this fall sharing messages based on what we believe and why it is important to know what we believe. But ultimately what is most important is relationship. God wants a relationship with us and we know God best in relationship and we share with others about God through relationship (sorry, but preaching to them just is not a good substitute). Think about it – you don't just want your ministers to teach you or tell you about God. We need to live in relationship with God and with each other.

Eating of the tree broke the relationship and the only thing the man and woman knew to do was to cover their nakedness and hide. *It turns out, however, that God is pretty good at finding.*

Bill Self, pastor of Johns Creek Baptist Church, once told the story of a boy in Colorado who was camping with his family. He wandered away from the campsite. The family was terribly distressed, and they called in the authorities to find their wandering boy who had epilepsy. They had two professional trappers, 2000 volunteers, six trained dogs, two Air Force helicopters, and one small plane. The mother took a bullhorn and walked through the forest, calling the boy's name, trying to find him. Finally, they found him. But before they did, the sheriff said on the news, "Kevin must calm himself and *lose his fear of being found.*" Think about what he just said: *lose his fear of being found.*

As I said earlier, fear and shame often go hand and hand. When we find ourselves in that valley of fear and shame we may be tempted to lose ourselves from God, afraid, if you will, of being found.

God looks for us when fear and shame have left us paralyzed. God looks for us when we have lost our way in the garden or the wilderness. God looks for us when sin presents itself like a juicy apple but when we bite in, we taste its bitterness. God looks for us when we are pointing our fingers and blaming everybody and everything else. God looks for us when we are busy looking at everything and everybody else to tell us how we measure up.

Even though we may fear being found, we should know that it is only in being found that we have any hope at all.

You see, most interesting of all is how this story ends...or another way to phrase this, how God answers his own question, "Where are you"? The man and woman were hiding because they could no longer stand themselves or stand to be around God. They could not take their own shame...but God could. And so, we find the answer to his own question in verse 21: And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Walter Brueggemann writes: "To be clothed is to be given life." There are many ways God could have answered his question that probed their lack of trust, their preoccupations, and their shame. He could have just destroyed them. That is how most of the mythological gods we read about in Greek and Roman lore handle problems of disobedience. But God – the LORD – covers their shame and sustains their life. God the Creator and God the Judge, now becomes, God the Preserver.

This is what happens when God asks, "*Where are you?*" and then finds you. What will you do when God asks, *Where are you?*"

We, the congregation of First Baptist Church, are to “let our light shine so that others may see our good works and give glory to God.” We know full well what it is like to hide and be found by God. In our shame and in our finding, we discover grace. God is asking the question, “Where are you?” to a community full of people lost in their sin, lost in disgrace, lost and fearing that they will never be found.

May we be found faithful to let our light shine bright that others may lose the fear of being found.

'What can we gain by sailing to the Moon if we are unable to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?'

--Thomas Merton