

Genesis 3:8-9

Dear Friends in Christ,

It's difficult to grasp how quickly we have once again traveled through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany to the beginning of another Season of Lent. I found myself recalling a poster that I have seen in one of our city's places of business. It's a picture of a young Frank Sinatra which has printed on it this statement he made: "You only live once, And the way I live, once is enough.

I then recalled what I think was an issue of Time Magazine from a number of years ago that had an article on Sinatra who was then turning 80 years old. He was asked, "What do you want for your birthday?" And he said, "Another birthday!" So, living "once" really isn't "enough", is it? Time flies - no matter how much fun you're having - or not!

It stands there in front of every one. It's waiting. It has a set time for each. Death. And then comes the big surprise for most. The confrontation with the other side, no matter how much you reject it, or how much you look forward to it.

We know death is the wages of sin. We know that left to ourselves there is nothing but death and eternal misery, or what is called *eternal death*. We need help. God gives it. And that's the road we're traveling this Season of Lent: "Questions That Lead Us From Death To Life." This First Sunday . . .

ADAM, WHERE ARE YOU?

I. God Finds Us.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:8-9)

I read about a man named Yam Sing who came from China to America and here was brought to know God's love through Jesus Christ. The account read:

He indicated his desire to be baptized and was examined regarding his faith. One questioner asked, "How did you find Jesus?" – expecting the young man to tell of his experience in coming to faith. But the new Christian replied, "Yam Sing no find Jesus; Jesus find Yam Sing".

The moment Adam and Eve sinned they were spiritually dead and ignorant of God's love and provision. "The man and the wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord." They didn't want Him. They didn't trust Him. They were fearful of Him. They didn't like His judgements, so they blamed Him for their problems. Paul says that we "were by nature children of wrath...". This is what our first parents passed on to us.

They hid. God goes after them. They hate. He loves. And the question: "Why didn't God make them in such a way so they couldn't fall into sin?" And the answer: If they would love Him, they would love Him freely, not as some sort of robots. Who of us would want someone to love us because the person has no choice? That isn't love.

And so it is, that God goes after them - as He did us. It fits precisely with Jesus' words to Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to this house...For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:9-10) God, through Christ, seeks and saves!

Let's put it this way: No one ever made a decision for Jesus. It is impossible for one who is "dead in trespasses and sin" to make themselves alive, much less make a decision. It is impossible for one who is lost to find the way back. We didn't find Jesus. Jesus found us. And, maybe for one or two here this morning, the question must be asked: "Where are you?"

II. God Asks Us.

And that's the question, isn't it? So, realistically, God asks each of us: "Where are you?" And please understand: God asks the question not because God doesn't know. He asks as part of the process of seeking and saving.

I'm guessing most of us can remember a moment - or many - when, as a child, we had done something we shouldn't have, and our mother or father asking that piercing question: "What have you done?" They didn't ask that because they were ignorant. They knew the answer, and we knew that they knew! They asked the question because they were going to drive home a point. And, if they were loving parents, the process wasn't designed to hurt us, but to teach, discipline and help us.

Sometime ago, I read an insight on God's "Where are you?" that's most significant for us:

His "Where are you?" is also His way of making us realize that we have not been listening to Him and trusting Him and have been indifferent to His call to discipleship. In the back of my mind there is something like "Don't you realize we are your parents and have concern and responsibility for you?" Our heavenly Father asks us the same: "Where are you? Don't you know that I am your heavenly Father and that I love you and want only the best for you? Won't you take my hand and walk with Me through all of life? Won't you learn from Me to love and serve?"

It often appears that the greatest conflict we have is in the context of the question Satan put in front of Eve, "Did God actually say...?" And, too often, our response wilts into a rationalization of God's Word as it did with Eve: "God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But God said nothing about *touching it*. In that moment, Eve's verbal response revealed what had already happened in her heart: Adding something to God's Word and seeing God as denying her what she wanted. She entered into sin and death.

Eve was the first self-made theologian and, as in the case of all self-made theologians, they pick and choose and interpret God's Word according to what they think and feel! The liberal, contemporary church movement has been around a long time. But the question stands: "Where are you?"

III. Where God Is.

But even more astounding is **Where God is**. It starts in Genesis 3:15 with God's first promise of the Christ Who would suffer for every human sin; His words to Satan: "'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'" That promise travels through the centuries to that moment when the angel said to the Shepherds, "'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" (Lk. 2:11) And then, on a Friday not too many years later, the bruising of Satan's head would be fulfilled in these words: "When Jesus received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (Jn. 19:30)

Now we know: God has always been there. The love of God has always been there, though most want little or nothing to do with it - or want it on their terms; specifically, if there is a God He must love me because I'm so lovable. But, praise be to God, the "Where are you?" can be answered by each of us with the confession, "I a poor miserable sinner confess unto you all my sins and inequities...and justly deserve your present and eternal punishment." And God answers through John the Baptist, "'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (Jn 1:29) And God promises, "'Whoever believes in him is not condemned....'" (Jn. 3:18)

And understand: there's an urgency for us to examine our answer to "Where are you?" every day of our lives. Repentance is a given - a constant - a persistent need for self-examination because, after all, the struggle with sin and guilt does not go away in this life. But, then, neither does the love, forgiveness and promise of eternal life in Christ!

I came across the following I find insightful for us this morning:

In the Middle Ages, when noblemen employed fools or jesters to amuse them, one man gave a valuable cane to his fool, telling him he could keep it until he found a greater fool, in which case he was to give the cane to him. After some time the nobleman lay on his deathbed. His jester came to say goodbye. "Where are you going, my lord?" he asked. "I'm going to another world," was the reply. "When will you return?" he asked. "Never," his master said. Then his fool asked, "Then surely your lordship has made preparation for the journey, haven't you?" ...he confessed, "I have not." The jester handed his cane to his dying master, saying, "Take this back; never could there be greater folly than yours."

"Adam...Eve...where are you?" It's the question that begins our journey from death to life - to Calvary and an emptied tomb. None of us can afford to ignore it. How foolish that would be.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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