

Genesis 3:8 – 15, 2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1 & Mark 3:20 – 35

It never ceases to amaze me how alive the word of God is, how God somehow speaks new words to us thru the scriptures- even though they are thousands of years old. That happened to me when I was reading our Old Testament lesson for today from Genesis.

Our passage begins, *they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze...* what a beautiful image! How could that have never stood out to me before? Of all the hundreds of times I must have read this verse, how could I have missed such a beautiful image? God walking thru creation at the time of the evening breeze... This phrase was especially striking to me this week because one evening, after I put the kids to bed, I went out and sat in the backyard- in the evening breeze... and what a peaceful experience it was!

It is quite different from the morning. The morning breeze brings with it the promise of the day, full of potential and possibilities, new hope for a limitless future... But in the evening breeze, what's done is done, what the day had to offer is past, what could have been- was- or now never will be. In the evening breeze, you are alone with the deeds of the day... and when you find yourself there- you have two choices; lament over your mistakes in sorrow- or breathe in the cool air of forgiveness and accept what is.

The creation stories lose so much power and meaning if we abuse them by taking them literally. They are mythic and of monumental importance because they speak of things that cannot be understood by a fleshy way of thinking, these are true stories about our spiritual natures. They speak of spiritual truths, ultimate reality. Adam and Eve represent all of humanity, they are us and we are them. What they experienced, we all encounter. This is not their story, this is our story.

And it is so interesting what happens in the passage we have today. This is immediately after their eyes were opened because they chose to pursue the path- of the knowledge of knowing good and evil... in other words the path of judging. And once they get started, they find they are pretty good at it and it comes quite easily. The first thing they judge is themselves. They judge themselves to be naked, which as we will see is more a judgment of God than themselves.

And it's hard to even read these stories because of the centuries of bad theology that have dominated their understanding. Naked is first of all a judgment, not the truth. The truth is they had no clothes. They make the judgment that this means they are naked. That's why God says, who told you- that because you didn't have any clothes- means you were naked? I mean, it's basically the same thing as saying, who told you that just because you have blond hair you are stupid or that because you have red hair you have a temper or because of the color of your skin you are any better or worse than anyone else? These are judgments we make- that are interpretations of reality, not the actual reality itself. The original mistake- is that we choose the path of judging one thing over another. And of course, God immediately knows why this has happened... their eyes of flesh have been opened.

And so, when their—our— eyes are opened in judgment, the first thing we look at is our relationship with God and claim that it is not enough. Remember this is not literal, there is nothing wrong, or obscene, of course, with the natural human form, it is God's crowning creation after all. But this goes even beyond that, this talks about spiritual realities. And so, naked- here- doesn't mean simply the lack of clothing for our bodies, it is a judgment against God. Nothing had changed, Adam and Eve were as they had always been, but now they judged that to be inadequate- naked- in the sense that they felt spiritually exposed, vulnerable, unprotected. They

looked in the mirror at God's perfect creation and said, *tss, is this the best you can do?* Life to them now looked uncertain, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and inadequate... in this sense they felt- naked.

And so, the first thing they do is try to take control and fix what they judged God to have messed up; rather than trusting God and accepting that they were- just as God had made them- pure and perfect and beautiful; they instead sew fig leaves to cover themselves. Again, spiritually speaking this means they turned away from the Creator and turned to created things to find security and protection... which is, of course the very definition of idolatry.

And of course, the very next thing that happened was fear. Deep down they knew that even when they took matters into their own hands and tried to protect and secure themselves- it wasn't good enough. Even with their clothing they were naked. So they became afraid, very afraid, so afraid that they hid from God. And in a very real way, that is still where most people find themselves. Spiritually, that is the state they are in, wrapped in bodies of flesh, hiding from God in creation. For them, life is one big, cosmic game of hide and seek... only, because they are so afraid, it isn't a very fun game.

And here enters Christ. Jesus came in and from day one began shattering our way of seeing things. You think kings are born in royal courts- wrong, I'm born in a barn. You think Messiah's come in on white horses and conquer kingdoms, wrong, I come humble and riding a donkey and I already have a kingdom. You think blood makes a family, wrong- those who are of the same spirit are family. In the parable he tells today, Jesus is saying, look, I came in and tied up Satan and now I'm turning his house upside down, searching for those who belong to me, just as a thief would do to a strong man whose house he wanted to rob. Satan is bound and I'm robbing his house, I'm shattering the way you think the world is, and if you follow me, I'll help you close those eyes of judgment you opened so long ago, and I'll teach you to trust God again.

And suddenly, when we close our eyes of flesh, our spiritual eyes spring open- and we realize it's not Adam and Eve- it's us, hiding from God in the evening breeze. Only now, with Christ as our guide, this time we don't have to respond with blame and guilt, remorse and fear at the mistakes we made... instead we stand boldly, exposed, vulnerable and yet unafraid before the one who made us. This time, we see that with God, we have all that we need and we know a security beyond anything we could create ourselves. This time, when God calls to us, where are you? We can say, *I'm here, I'm right where you put me, I'm just as you made me. I've made some mistakes this day, I accept that, and if you don't mind, I'd like to talk with you about them.* And God, reaching out his hand, replies, *come, I'd be happy to, walk with me in the evening breeze.*

Our God is so good! And as the saying goes, God didn't make no junk, only thru Christ's eyes are we able to see our own beauty, the beauty of God's crowning creation. We go so wrong when we judge ourselves, for when we do that, we are really judging God. So don't hide, step out into the night air, reach out your hands and your Creator will take you in his arms and show you your true beauty. And when we walk again with God in the evening breeze, we'll finally understand that- fig leaves or not- we have all we could ever dream of in perfect measure. Amen.