

Where Are You?

First Sunday in Lent

February 25 and 26, 2023

First in a Series of 7 Sermons - "Questions of Lent"

- **March 8 - "Where Are You Going? (Abraham)**
- **March 15 - "Why Do You Quarrel? (Moses)**
- **March 22 - "Why Was He Born Blind" (Blind Beggar)**
- **March 29 - "Can These Bones Live" (Ezekiel)**
- **Palm Sunday "Why Such Humiliation?" (Jesus)**
- **Easter Sunday "Why Are You Crying?" (Mary Magdalene)**

Genesis 3: 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?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

Dear Friends in Christ,

A certain couple started out their marriage strong, and all was well. But as time went on, they began to argue about matters both big and small. Both of them developed a habit of wanting to get the last word. Their conflicts often escalated into shouting matches.

One day, the wife had locked her keys in the car for the third time in a couple of weeks. Her husband went into a rage and ended his little rant with "How in the world could God create a woman so beautiful and at the same time so stupid?" To which she replied, "He made me beautiful so that you would marry me, and he made me so stupid so that I would marry you!"

As a friend of mine would say, there's trouble in paradise. In today's sermon, we explore the original trouble in paradise. We don't see Adam and Eve arguing and shouting at each, but we do see Eve conversing with a talking serpent and Adam apparently standing by and letting it happen. We hear Eve misquote Scripture and Adam staying quiet. We watch as the devil leads instead of Adam. Genesis 3 ends with God castigating everybody in sight, including Eve who is cursed in three ways, 1) her pain in childbearing would be multiplied, 2) your desire shall be contrary to your husband, and 3) but he shall rule over thee.

One translation reads, "unto thy husband thou shalt be attracted." Or as paraphrased by a number of women I've known over the years, "Men. Can't live without them, can't live with them." Interesting, isn't it? That part of the penalty inflicted on women in this

fallen world is that many of them would even have this desire for a man in their lives. And secondly, that in so many ways, instead of laying down their lives for their brides in loving and sacrificial ways, they have led the way in dominating and intimidating and even abusive fashion.

In today's sermon, we explore God's first recorded question in history. The fall of humanity into sin begins with Adam and Eve tasting of the forbidden fruit, then realizing and being ashamed of their nakedness, and then hiding from the very God who is everywhere and knows all things. God comes looking for them, and He asks, "Where Are You?"

Three parts to our sermon today, three additional questions:

- *What do we learn about the strategies of Satan as he tries to lead us into temptation?*
- *What do we learn about the strategies of God as He comes looking for lost sinners?*
- *What do we learn about our life together in this fallen world?*

Question #1: What do we learn about the strategies of Satan as he tries to lead us into temptation?

First, of all, we learn that Satan is a liar. He lies morning, noon, and night. Scriptures describe him as the prince of lies, the father of lies, the liar of all liars. In Genesis 3, he lies as a way of creating doubt in Eve's mind about both God's words and motives. That doubt led to the original disobedience, which led to the original curse, resulting in chaos in every generation, without exception.

God said that if Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. Satan countered that by wondering out loud if God had really said that, and when Eve repeated the command, he just flat out told lie #1, "You shall not die."

That lie seemed to slide right past Eve's defenses, and so Satan went the extra step to hook and reel her in. He established a motive for God to trick Adam and Eve. He suggested that God knew that in the day they ate of this tree, their eyes would be opened and they would be like God. They would know good and evil. Life would be better. They would be happier and stronger and more in control.

And so Eve ate the forbidden fruit. She moved from doubt to disobedience, and to make matters worse, she invited Adam to taste, and so it began. They fell into darkness, and they fell hard. In that moment, their eyes were opened and they saw what they were not expecting to see. They saw themselves to be naked and they were ashamed. An alarm went off inside of them, and in fact, their consciences began to operate, as God had designed them to operate.

A paradise where the animal and plant and human kingdoms lived together in sweet harmony had turned sour. Which is exactly what Satan and the forces of darkness were and are all about. Satan's agenda has always been, is today, and always will be to draw humanity away from God, away from His Word, and away from His good and gracious will.

When the adversary is having his way, our differences escalate into shouting matches, our good intentions keep going awry, our families are at odds, our hearts are hurting, and our minds are misguided. When his strategies are succeeding, loved ones are going to bed mad, silent treatments are ruling the day, church pews are empty, and Bibles are collecting dust. When the forces of darkness are prevailing, the Ten Commandments are reduced to suggestions, creeds are discarded in favor of whichever way the winds are blowing, and grandmas and grandpas are worried sick about the spiritual condition of their descendants.

Question #2: What do we learn about the strategies of God as He comes looking for lost sinners?

Two strategies come to mind. The first strategy we notice in our text is that God asks good questions as a way of getting us to admit that we need help.

I remember a time when my daughter Michelle and a friend of hers from Concordia in Seward, Nebraska got lost in Iowa on their way back to Minnesota. Of course she called home, looking for help. My first question was, "Where are you? They didn't really know.

The next questions included, "What cities have you passed?" And "What mile marker are you at?" And "Which direction are you going? We determined that they were still traveling east on Interstate 80 and that they had missed the exit for Interstate 35 going north towards Minnesota. I tried to resist asking the sarcastic questions like, "How could you be so inattentive?" and "Is this your first rodeo?"

In any case, the first question was "where are you?" and we went from there. So also with Adam. God started this crucial conversation in simple and friendly fashion, **"Where are you?"** With that question, God seemed to be saying, "You're lost, my good friend, and step #1 is to admit that you've messed up and you need help. Instead of admitting his wrongdoing, Adam answered that he was afraid, because he was naked, and so he hid himself.

God's second, third, and fourth questions also and simply asked for the facts. **“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And to Eve, “What is this that you have done?”**

With these questions, God was inviting Adam and Eve to give short answers that would admit the error of their ways. Instead, Adam blamed it on the woman that God had given to be with him. And Eve blamed the serpent for tricking her. God wanted Adam to see that something new had just happened inside of him. His conscience had just kicked into gear. God's strategy was to move Adam and Eve towards listening to that inner voice and to make a clear and sincere confession of their sins. Instead, they excused, explained, and passed the buck.

Which leads us to a second strategy, the ultimate goal of all of God's questions - which is to graciously draw sinners back to close relationship with him. In contrast to so many of our questions which have all kinds of different motivations, God's questions in this text are aimed towards sincere repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

God's great desire was, is, and ever shall be to have mercy on sinners. As soon as mankind fell into sin, God announced the plan. From this time forward there would be enmity between Eve and her pretend friend Satan, there would be animosity between her offspring /believers and Satan's offspring / unbelievers, there would be the fiercest of all battles in the Garden of Gethsemane and on a little hill outside of Jerusalem, where Satan would bruise the heel of Jesus and Jesus would crush the head of the Tempter.

And so it is at the cross and the empty tomb, where we see God's ultimate strategy. Where we see God's true colors. Where God ultimately came looking for us, where He stooped down into our world, **He was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes, we are healed.** Which brings us to question #3

Question #3: What do we learn about our life together in this fallen world? At least three lessons in closing.

Lesson #1 is that every time Eve or one of her daughters would bring a child into this world, the pain of childbirth would be a reminder that disobeying God's clear commands always brings sorrow and suffering instead of satisfaction. That every child we bring into this world faces a lifetime of trouble that will include daily temptations towards, as Luther writes, misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Lesson #2 about our life together is that in all of our marriages, without exception, there will be heartache and disappointment. Instead of laying down their lives for their dear

brides, men will be tempted to live for themselves and rule with a heavy hand. Instead of helping their husbands be all that they can be, women will be listening to the wrong voices and making matters worse. Men and women and children of all ages, in every generation, will suffer unending frustrations in their work. The thorns and thistles will be prickly, the days will be sweaty and frustrating, and without exception, the sting of death will have its day.

Lesson #3 about our life together is that every day, we live in the tension of competing truths. While on the one hand it is true that the wages of sin is death, on the other hand, it is true that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. While on the one hand, life is short and hard and full of trouble, on the other hand, in Christ there is a peace and a contentment and a joy and a strength the devil and his demons can never touch. While on the one hand, we learn from trial and error, on the other hand - Christ has taken all of our trials and errors to the cross, where He dealt with them once and for all. While on the one hand it is true that there is no rest for the wicked, on the other hand - when the dust of every day has settled, we are invited to lay our heads down in peace, resting in the promises of our God.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city full of folks who daily are tempted, they stumble, their good intentions go awry, they fall, they make excuses, they mess up, they get lost. And yet Jesus Christ keeps on seeking them out. He seeks them out in the preaching of His Word, He seeks them out in the circumstances of everyday life, He seeks them out in the quiet of their devotional life, He seeks them out in the eating and the drinking of His Supper. Every night these folks go to bed asking God to forgive the wrongs they have done and the good they have failed to do. They ask him to bless whatever they may have gotten right. They fall asleep with a clean conscience, not because they have earned it with good clean living but because their Father in heaven has declared them to be clean, for the sake of and in the name of Jesus Christ.

They have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

On their bad days, they fall into temptation, and they fall hard.

On their good days, they make the sign of the cross, they remember that they are the baptized people of God, they confess their faults before God, and the grace of God sweeps over their collective souls.

On their really good days, their thankfulness to God for blessings received spills over into the lives of others in a way that gives God all kinds of glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen