

*Naked Shame*  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Karen A. Blomberg  
Westminster Presbyterian Church – Alexandria, VA  
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Scripture: Psalm 32; Genesis 3:1-10

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I. Introduction

*And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.*  
Genesis 2:25

In their so called “fall from innocence” Adam and Eve are *exposed* to life and to each other in a different way – a way that leads to among other things, the experience of hiding, of covering, of blaming. Shame is encountered for the first time by the first man and the first woman. Its effects are deep and wide. It is destructive.

My sermon today acknowledges the power of shame, and offers some suggestions for how we might relate to this very human predicament that we share – where shame is held in the secret recesses of our minds and hearts; where the covering over of shame is heavy and keeps us from living fully.

The cartoon by Bruce Eric Kaplan portrays a mother walking into her toddler son’s bedroom. We see a teddy bear, a mirror, a bed, a night stand with a lamp on it, and a toy truck in the middle of the bedroom. The mother, standing in the doorway says to her beautiful young son, “What should we attach shame to today?” (*New Yorker Magazine*, November 8, 2004)

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*"What should we attach shame to today?"*

Many of us remember hearing a particular sound when we were toddlers. One of our parents would make this noise whenever we risked behaviors outside of the norms, or tried something we thought was OK, or participated in something secretly (or so we thought). The sound penetrated and diminished us. The sound each of us heard as a kid at one time or another is that sound that only

parents can make with their tongues – that kind of clicking sound that is followed by the familiar words, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

The word *shame* comes from the same root as the word that means *to cover*. Shame can be defined as

*A painful sensation excited by a consciousness of guilt or impropriety, or of having done something which injures, or of the exposure of that which modesty prompts us to conceal.*

Whenever we experience shame, we want to cover up, to hide.

Several years ago I saw an HBO special that featured comedian Dana Carvey. He talked about how his two young toddler boys love, “Naked Time.” This is a designated time each day when his boys get to run around the house naked – no clothes – just as free as they can be. The purpose? Purely and simply, to enjoy their nakedness!

One of the first places we may go in our minds when we hear something like that is “What if they go to the bathroom on the floor?” or “What if somebody stops by unexpectedly?” What if, what if, what if. These questions have their origin in shame.

One of the results of the “fall” is that we become conditioned to forget our naturalness. We forget our wholeness. Whenever we forget our wholeness, we suffer. One way we suffer is to experience shame. Our naturalness, our authenticity, becomes shameful.

The notion of our naked-ness often evokes shame. So, what does all of this mean for us today?

## II. Identifying Shame

Lent provides an opportunity for us to gently and safely ask ourselves,

- “Am I willing to look at what it is that is hidden or covered up in me?”
- “Of what am I ashamed?”
- “How does my covering up prevent me from living genuinely and fully?”

As part of our Lenten practice, we may choose to pay attention to how our actions COVER UP something inside of us, how our habits keep us hidden from God and from one another.

Some popular coverings, things that keep us hidden, include:

- Overworking

- Making jokes about most things
- Cynicism
- Anger
- Blame
- Not taking responsibility
- Over-identification with “our story”, our circumstances

When we identify and name our coverings, we become bold enough to consider:

- What is underneath my overworking?
- What does my cynicism keep me from addressing?
- How does my joking mask what’s going on inside of me?
- How does attachment to my story, my identity, prevent me from creating a new story that invites God and others in?
- How does shame weigh me down?
- How does the act of concealment bury me in exhaustion?

### III. Conclusion

Our Genesis story moves from:

*the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.*

To God calling to the man later, “*Where are you?*”

To the man hearing the sound of God in the garden and responding,

*“I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*

to

*“And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.”*

In this earth life, we will likely continue to wear coverings on our bodies most of the time. I wonder if our clothes are a metaphor, a reminder that there is always something to be discovered, exposed, revealed, enjoyed. We create layers of all sorts to remain hidden. Whenever the unseen parts and feelings of us are covered up, we suffer.

### IV. Hermeneutical transfer

In Lent, I’m not suggesting that we run around naked. But we might create our own Lenten version of “naked time” - a time when we expose a greater or lesser degree of ourselves, in our nakedness to the God who created us. By so doing, we may learn what is underneath our hiding cloths that we sew for ourselves. We may hear the sound of God in response to our experience of our personal naked shame. The sound of God’s presence following us and our awareness of this may begin to dissolve the suffering.

One discipline for us during Lent may go something like this:

Remember that shame is a clue that God is calling to you.  
Allow yourself to feel the shame you may be holding deeply inside. Allow  
God to enter with you into your silent chamber of shame.

Acknowledge that what you have done has harmed others and  
yourselves. Allow yourself to feel that injury.

Believe that God does not want you to suffer the heaviness of shame.  
When we uncover our shame, God “covers” our transgressions, creating  
in us a spirit of righteousness.

Take responsibility for whatever has caused shame to reside in you.  
Practice whatever righteous action is necessary. These actions may  
include

- changing behavior to more positive action
- shifting thinking about a situation or an individual
- expressing gratitude to others and to God
- forgiving self and others by saying,

*Forgiven. Forgiven. All is forgiven.*

Lent provides for us a holy framework, a sanctuary, to experience the joy that  
comes when we acknowledge our shame, our guilt, our missing the mark.

Lent is about our vulnerability touching the vulnerability of God  
through Jesus, who allowed *himself* to be *weighed down* with our grief and  
shame.

In Christ we are met at this table – in the sharing of vulnerabilities.  
Here we partake of hope; of grace; of healing.  
We reclaim our wholeness, we hide no longer.

We are seen for who we are – the people of God ... in this place, and outside  
these walls! We worship a God who does not shame us, but who welcomes us.

When the weight of shame is lifted, we celebrate with the psalmist :

*Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,  
and whose sin is put away!...  
You, O God, are my hiding place;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. (Psalm 32)*

May we hear the sound of God walking toward us and not be afraid.  
And so it is. Amen.