

Genesis 1-11

Where are you?

Chapter 3:8-9

August 13, 2006

When I was a kid growing up in Minnesota my family had a summer tradition. Every Sunday night all seven kids and my parents would cram into a huge Ford station wagon with fake wood paneling and we'd head off to Dairy Queen where I would order the extra large soft-serve vanilla crunch cone. Well, one Sunday evening the entire family piled into the huge Ford station wagon with fake wood paneling but they left me at home. I'm not sure how they forgot me because I was always loud, always in trouble and always breaking something or annoying someone. But for some reason my analytical, scientifically-trained dad didn't do a headcount on that Sunday. So they left me behind. Do you know what it's like to be lost, left out and alienated? It hurts. I sat on the steps and cried. Of course this story has a happy ending. When they arrived at the Dairy Queen my mom noticed that I wasn't there (my older brother also noticed right away but he "forgot" to tell anyone) so they turned that huge Ford station wagon around and sped back to find me.

Have you ever been lost and found? Has someone ever pursued you and sought you and searched for you and then they found you? How does that feel? It feels wonderful. You're home. You feel loved because someone cared enough to go after you and find you. This may surprise us but the Bible is basically the story about how we got lost and God came to find us. Of course in the Bible God didn't mess up and forget to do a headcount; we just walked away from God. We hid from God. We ditched God.

You can find the beginning of this lost and found story in verse 9 of our first Bible reading this morning. God's search for us begins with a very simple question: *Where are you?* In Hebrew, the original language that the Bible was written in, this question is only one word – *ayeka*. *Where are you?*

Did you ever notice that some of the best "answers" to life's problems are actually questions? That's why Jesus loved asking questions. If you have thirty minutes, sit down and read through the entire Gospel of Mark and circle every question that Jesus asked. You'll discover that Jesus not only taught by giving answers to life but he also taught by asking the great questions of life.

Where are you? It is perhaps the most important question that you will ever face. *Where are you?* It's the shortest and most devastating and most hopeful question anyone will ever ask you. *Where are you?* This little question captures the complete story of how we got lost and how we can be found. *Where are you?* Most importantly of all, this question can bring us into the presence of the most important Person in the universe – God, the One who addresses this question to you and me.

Before we dive into this question and the story of lost and found let's back up so we get the entire story in perspective. In the first two chapters of Genesis we find a story of beauty and glory and perfection. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (1:1) ... and it was very good (1:31)." God made us to be incredible image bearers of God's own glory and dignity. We were made to rule and reign with God (see 1:26-27 and 2:15). You were meant to live as a bold, creative artist and craftsman living in an exciting relationship with God, other people and all of creation. It's a high and holy calling.

But then in Genesis chapter 3 we heard the story that we sometimes entitle "The Fall." It's a story that tells us how we got lost. And remember I said that this story is historical and mythical in the sense that it is *our* story too. It's a story of mistrust and rebellion against the good heart of God.¹ Our first parents said, "We can decide what is good and evil, right and wrong. We're smart enough; we know what's best." So they did: they rebelled against God and walked away from God. From then on we see the story of humanity is a revolt against God. We become not just little kids waiting on the front steps; we become fugitives and rebels who flee from God.

In verse 7 we see that happens to people who live as fugitives from God. (Read verse 7). At the end of chapter 2 in verse 25 we find this amazing picture of bliss – "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." In other words, they didn't have any walls or, as we would say, "issues." Now after sin enters the world, after we walk away from God, something else enters the picture: shame. Shame is that sense of unease at the heart of our being. It's the sense that something is not right inside us. Some people call it alienation or brokenness. I was explaining it to a friend this week and she said, "O, you just mean that we're not perfect." I replied, "Actually, it's much worse than that. It means that the brokenness in the cosmos isn't just out there, but it's inside us; it's inside me. I not only live in a broken universe and a broken planet and a broken country; but I live with a broken human being called me. I'm not just a passive victim of brokenness; I am perpetrator of brokenness." This truth leads to shame, the healthy, normal, God-given sense of unease or dis-ease that all is not well with me.

For a brilliant depiction of the fall read the novel by Albert Camus with the same name – *The Fall*. Camus' story centers on a successful lawyer named Clamence, a respected, arrogant man. Clamence views himself as a moral and decent human being – a good person. He never accepted bribes. He tried to be decent and generous to everyone. There is almost no problem that he cannot solve. He sleeps with many different women, but he never hurts anyone. He is secure in his self-esteem. But all of this changes one day when he hears a young suicide plunge into the river and he does nothing to rescue her. At that moment he is given a searching look into who he really is – and it isn't

¹ This story of mistrust and rebellion is found in chapter 3:1-7. At the first the serpent and then the man and the woman mistrust and then defy God's clear commandment in Genesis 2:16-17. And we also saw that the "knowledge of the tree of good and evil" was more than just a random rule that God made. Instead, it symbolized all of God's generous goodness and God's definition of right and wrong and good and evil. So by taking the forbidden fruit our first parents were saying, "We can decide what is good and evil, right and wrong. We're smart enough; we're advanced enough; we know what's best."

pleasant. His indifference during the crisis becomes what he calls the “bitter waters of my baptism.” He begins to observe his own heart, and he does not like what he sees. He begins to notice his selfishness: his irritation when someone interrupts one of his stories, his anger when someone dares to disagree with him, his inability to love and remain faithful to one woman. Finally, he confesses, “I was not simple, for modesty helped me to shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress.” In all honesty, he is just a coward and a hypocrite. He comes to the painful realization that he’s no better than anyone else – he is a fallen, flawed, broken human being.²

Our sense of fallenness brings a deep sense of shame. And notice what shame does in this Genesis story: it separates us from others. It builds walls of fear and hostility. And it drives us to fix what is wrong, to heal the disease, to cover what has been exposed. The author John Powell wrote a powerful little book called *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* Powell said that I’m afraid to tell you who I am because if you saw the “real me” it might not be good enough; it might be defective or broken or dirty or disgusting or just inadequate. So it’s better and safer to put on fig leaves and hide from you.

Notice the attempt by Adam and Eve in verse 7 – “they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” The fig trees in the Middle East produce some of the largest leaves in that area. Fig leaves represent anything we do or achieve or have so we can cover our nakedness and shame. I have fig leaves. You have fig leaves. We have fig leaves called status and awards and degrees and intellectualism and clothing and style and morality. Children can become our fig leaves. We hide behind the activities and accomplishments of our children.

Blaming others is a huge fig leaf. You see, if I keep blaming you for my problems, if you can blame your spouse or your church or your political leaders for all your problems, you don’t have to own your own nakedness. That’s exactly what Adam and Eve did in this passage: they passed the buck. “It’s that woman you gave me.” Or “it’s that man you gave me, God. He or she is defective. If I could just get rid of him or her or them, I wouldn’t feel naked and ashamed.”

Religion can become nothing more than a big, fat, juicy fig leaf. Yes, religion has been one of the most popular fig leaves in the history of the human race. Fig leaves are anything that we use to hide behind, to prove that we’re not defective or broken or sinful. They come in different shapes and sizes but they all have this one thing in common: they’re a self-made, self-covering project to cover our shame and nakedness.

Then notice verse 8 – “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the Garden in the cool of the day...” The words “sound of the Lord” and “walking” are often used symbolically in the Bible to refer to a simple idea: God is present (see Deuteronomy 5:25; 8:20; 13:19; for “walking” see Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:14-15 and 2 Samuel 7:6-7). God is present. God comes looking for the lost man and the lost woman. And what do they do? They keep running. See the rest of verse 9 – “they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Once again, the

² Adapted from *Hope Has Its Reasons* by Rebecca Pippert, pages 28-31.

Bible says that we're not lost because God forgot to do a headcount; we're lost because we ran away and hid. In other words, if it was up to us to seek and find God, we'd all be hopelessly and eternally lost. The Bible even puts it this way: "There is no one righteous, not even one ... no one who seeks God. All have turned away" (Romans 3:10-12). The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, "You cannot have the truth in such a way that you catch it, but only in such a way that it catches you." Our relationship with God is the same way: God catches us.

Let me tell you a little slice of my own story about how God caught me. Some people assume that because I'm a pastor I must have always loved God and wanted to serve God. Actually, when I was a teenager I just wanted God to go away. I treated Jesus like a black bear or a cougar – I believed in him but I wanted him to keep his distance. When I was 15 years old Jesus was the last thing in the world I wanted to accept. So I spent a good year actively running from Jesus. But the hunt was on. God chases fugitives. God finds lost people. That's what we see in Genesis and that's what we see in our Gospel reading. Jesus pursues a crooked runt named Zaccheus. The end of the hunt came for me on a Friday evening right after my 16th birthday. A bunch of guys were just hanging out and playing pool when I engaged in a fist fight with my friend George. I don't remember the issue but I'll never forget the rage I felt. I wanted to kill George. That night I looked into the abyss of my brokenness and I knew I could keep running from God, covering my shame with a program of fig leaves or I could stop running and surrender to Christ. I didn't really want Jesus. But I didn't want to keep running like a fugitive carrying around a bunch of pathetic fig leaves. So I gave up and said, "Okay, Jesus, you've been hounding me for over a year now. You can come into my life." You see, I didn't catch him; he caught me.

So here's the amazing twist to this hide-and-seek story: God calls out to a lost humanity. God pursues the fugitives. *Where are you?* On the one hand, the fact that God calls out to these lost fugitives is like a summons. After all, God is the Judge of the whole earth. God will call all of us to account for our lives. So there is judgment in this question. *Where are you?* Part of the question means, "You've lived 16 or 26 or 46 or 66 years of your life and where are you? What have you done with your life? Is it time for a wake up call in your life? Are you ready to meet God face to face?" It exposes our hiding, our running and our fig leaves. You see, God didn't ask the question for His benefit. He already knew exactly where Adam was. Adam needed the question to wake him up, to rattle him, to take him by the collar and shake him. That's certainly part of *Where are you?* Perhaps God is asking the question that way into your heart even this morning. Perhaps you need a wake up call this morning.

Where are you? This simple question also means something else: it's the question of someone who loves us. Think of it along these lines: a husband hides behind his newspaper lost in world events, lost in his job, lost in his fear of failure and his pursuit of more success and so his wife asks him to put down the paper and she looks him in the eye and asks, "Where are you? Where did you go? Why are you hiding? I miss you." Or think of a 17 year old girl who finally comes home at 3:00 in the morning, reeking with alcohol and cigarettes, and her broken-hearted bleary-eyed father meets her at the door.

The next day he sits by her bed and asks, “Where are you? Where did you go? Where is that little girl that was so full of life and joy and love?” And he’s saying, “I miss you.” Did you ever think that God misses you? Did you ever think that you’re not just in trouble with God, but that the God of the universe notices your absence, your waywardness, your flight from Him – and He wants you back?

That’s exactly what the Bible teaches. The Bible is a story of lost and found – God is the Seeker and we are the lost fugitives. Throughout the Older Testament God keeps saying to His people, “Return to me. Come back to me. What happened to the intimacy we once had? You moved away.” And all throughout the Older Testament God was providing a way for us to come back, to cover our nakedness and shame, to lure us out of hiding. As you read through the Older Testament you see how serious our sin is. It isn’t just “oops, my bad.” It’s deadly to our relationship with God. It creates a debt that we could never pay. And all throughout the Bible God is giving us clues, mapping out a path for us to return to Him. God keeps saying, “A new day is coming. There is a new way for you to come to me, a new way to heal your brokenness, a new way to cover your shame, a new way to live, a new way to love others, a new way for the entire earth. And then Jesus comes and he says, “That new day has come. I am the new way that was promised.” When Jesus died on the cross he paid the debt for our waywardness and built a bridge to people who were lost. At the cross he covered our shame. That’s why Jesus kept saying, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28-30). Just come, Jesus said. Quit hiding.

So let me ask you this morning: *Where are you? Where are you?* What are your fig leaves? What or who do you need to prove that you’re adequate? The righteousness of Christ is available to you this morning. That means that when you place your faith in Jesus, when you trust him with your whole heart, he covers your shame. You don’t have to wear fig leaves anymore. You don’t have to hide anymore. So come home.