

## Where Are You?

### First Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2020

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#### 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,

I begin today with one of my favorite marriage stories. 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, and their conflicts often escalated to the point where they had developed the habit of both wanting to get in the last word instead of solving the problem.

One day, the wife had locked her keys in the car for the third time in a couple of weeks, and the husband went into a rage ending 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. Conflicted marriages is exactly what God was predicting in Genesis 3 when part of Eve's curse would be that she would even have this desire to usurp his leadership, and husbands would have this nasty tendency to turn sacrificial leadership into harsh tyranny. Here in our text for today, the battle of the sexes has begun. It's the woman as rebel against the man as authoritarian.

In today's sermon, we explore God's question to Adam and Eve, "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?*

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**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. He is 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, doubt which led to disobedience, disobedience which led to chaos not just for Adam and Eve, but for generations to come with no 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 quickly went to Adam, she him to eat, and he ate. Together they disobeyed, they rebelled, they went their own way, and the result was chaos. In that moment, their eyes were opened and they saw what they were not expecting to see. They saw themselves to be naked, and so they did the best to cover up their shame. An alarm went off inside of them, in fact their conscience was now operating just as God had designed it to operate.

A paradise where the animal and plant and human kingdoms lived together in perfect harmony had turned chaotic. Which is exactly what Satan and the forces of darkness were and are all about. Peter described the devil as a roaring lion stalking about seeking whom he might devour. When the adversary is having his way, our marriages are conflicted, our families are at odds, and our hearts are self-centered. When his strategies are succeeding, loved ones are going to bed mad, the silent treatment is ruling the day, and God is kept at a distance. Let there be no doubt about it - the devil's agenda in every one of our days and in every chapter of our life together is to create doubt in our minds about the clear commands of God's Word, it is to bring about disobedience in the lives of people who know better, it is to entice decent folks of all ages away from the love of Jesus Christ, away from the inspired Word of God, away from Divine Service, away from our Lord's Supper, which is a foretaste of paradise itself.

Lesson #1 - what do we learn about the strategies of Satan? We learn that he's a liar, that his lies have a way of spreading and spiraling and separating, and that in fact, the devil revels in guilty sinners alienated from their Creator. Or as St. Paul writes to the Romans, "**just as sin**

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came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

### 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, and you know what my first question was. It was “where are you?” Actually they had no idea, but after a few more questions (what cities have you passed? What mile marker?) it seems as though they were traveling east towards Des Moines on Interstate 80, and they missed the exit for Interstate 35 going north towards Minnesota. At this point, if I remember, they were 20 or miles east of Des Moines, getting further and further away from home. (How do you miss the intersection of two interstates in the middle of Iowa?)

In any case, the first question was “where are you?” and we went from there. So also with Adam. The first question was 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, Adam answered that he was afraid, because he was naked, and so he hid himself.

And so God asks question #2, who told you that you were naked? Now God could have thrown the curse on these two fallen sinners then and there, but he didn’t. Rather, he seemed to be pointing out to Adam that something new had just happened inside of him, his conscience had just kicked into gear. An inner voice was telling Adam that he was naked and guilty before God. God wanted Adam to see that he was corrupted in his heart because he had in fact disobeyed with his actions.

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 our questions which have all kinds of different motivations, God’s questions are always aimed towards repentance and a growing faith. God’s third question is very direct - have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? Adam does admit that he ate, but only after he passes the buck to Eve for giving him the fruit to eat, and even suggesting that it was at least partly God’s fault for giving him that woman.

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At which point God turns to Eve and directly asks, “What is this you have done?” Eve also tries to pass the blame onto the serpent, but then admits that she had eaten the forbidden fruit. The point of all of these questions, dear friends was to lead them to repentance.

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 enmity between her offspring /believers and Satan’s offspring / unbelievers, there would be enmity at the cross where Satan would bruise the heel of Jesus and Jesus would crush the head of the Tempter. And so it is at the cross, where God ultimately came looking for us, 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 four 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 sin brings sorrow and suffering instead of satisfaction. Of course the pain doesn’t end with childbirth. Every child we bring into this world faces a lifetime of trouble that will include all kinds of trials and temptations and worse.

Lesson #2 is that in all of our marriages, without exception, there will be trouble. 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 rebelling and making matters worse. Because Adam listened to Eve instead of God, he will suffer unending frustration in his work. Nothing will come easy for him, he will often work long hours and have very little to show for it.

Lesson #3 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 we must face the final and fierce enemy of death, on the other hand that enemy has been defeated by Christ in His suffering, death, and resurrection. While on the one hand it is true that from dust and ashes we came and unto dust and ashes we will return, on the other hand it is true that in Christ there is a resurrection of the body.

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 every day life, He seeks them out in the quiet of their devotional life, He seeks them out in the eating and

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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.

Amen