

Friends, if we're going to give testimony and claim to have made any progress on the journey of faith, I think we have to acknowledge some kind of starting point -- a moment...a place...an event or series of events that we call "square one"! We've come this far; but we came through a bunch of yesterdays to get here. So, this morning I want to revisit the original "square one"...to examine the first few "yesterdays" in the sacred story of our faith as recorded in the book of Genesis.

Now, people understand and interpret Genesis in many ways. I think it's a good thing that religion has contrast and texture. On the other hand, people use Genesis for divisive purposes – to **debate** the question concerning evolution versus creation; to **define** the institution of marriage; to **describe** the nature of humankind. It's not such a good thing when contrast becomes conflict or differences in texture become the basis for violent disagreement.

I want to go back to the Garden to see if there's anything we can agree upon. Let's bring our hearts and minds together for a few moments of theological **reflection**. Let's see if the text (I'm going to read it again in just a moment) presents any spiritual questions for our consideration. And before we depart from one another, let's see if we can find the willingness to be **refashioned** in faith as the result of our Garden encounter.

Hear now the New Revised Standard translation of the ancient Hebrew text, from the book of *Genesis Chapter 3: verses 8-10*:

*They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, 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?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."*

I want you to meditate with me on the topic, **Hiding from God**.

The first sermon I preached, I told the congregation that when I was a kid, I thought God and Santa Claus were the same thing. I didn't think they were the same person; but I thought they were both far-off figures you could only reach in prayer or by wishing. When you're 6 years old, you might not have a perfect grasp of time and distance; but you know that God is a very long sleigh ride away.

And when I was 6-years old, I had everything I could have wanted. I grew up on the east side of the Connecticut River in Vernon – not Eden; but certainly comfortable. My parents provided a secure home...I had the companionship of my brother and neighborhood friends. I had the blessing of good health...good food...good everything. Not the best of everything; but I had everything I could have wanted.

Yet, there was one thing that I that I thought would make life *even better*. If I knew PARADISE in my youth, this **one thing** would make PARADISE even better. I had a dark-colored birth mark on the right side of my forehead and cheek and I was always so ashamed of it. I thought it was ugly and, therefore, I thought *I* was ugly and incomplete. I had everything I could have wanted; but I wanted one thing more. I wanted God to take that birth mark away.

So, I sent up my wishes to God, I mean Santa Claus...whichever...for this one thing. **7 years old**, no results. **8 years old**, no results. Here's the turning point. At **9 years old**, the minister at my grandmother's church told me that prayer would work even better than wishing. I had heard (maybe in Sunday school) that God made everything...and that God had said that everything was good. I heard that; but I was skeptical. So, I took the minister's prayer suggestion to mean that there was an appeals process. If you're not satisfied with the goodness of God's creation; you can turn to God in prayer with your own input about how God can improve things.

I prayed and I prayed. And those prayers, I now believe, ceased to be prayers at some point and became an insistent and obsessive demand of God. **10 years old**, no results. The minister had failed me. His information and, furthermore, his church had failed me. God (and Santa Claus) had most certainly failed me. If my memory can be trusted, I started to play God at **11 years old** because I was skeptical of the real God.

I wasn't very good at playing God. I was manipulative, not benevolent...often thinking that life would be better if I could get MY one wish...if I could have things MY way. I was certain that people were staring at me and feeling sorry for me. I was self-centered. I felt sorry for myself – took greater stock of my one so-called flaw and ignored the many blessings that were mine. In school, I played the class clown to deflect people's attention. Ashamed of what the real God had made, I tried to re-make myself in the image of what I thought others wanted me to be.

By the time I was a teenager, this playing God business had made me deeply self-conscious. It was just too much to handle. I had had plastic surgery to remove the birthmark; and the surgery left scars where the birthmark had been. So, I would try to hide the surgery scars from people by wearing hats or by standing at certain angles to avert their gaze. I felt anxious in new places with new people. As a result of this hiding from humanity, I ultimately began to hide from God. In fact, I turned away from God...from religion...from ministers who, in my opinion, were hoarding the magic and miracles for themselves. Ashamed. Skeptical. Self-Conscious. Hiding from God. That's my "square one".

Adam and Eve lived the same theme. Adam and Eve lived in a PARADISE situation. They had everything they could have wanted...good health...good food...good companionship...good everything.

We began reading at Chapter 3: verse 8; but earlier in the chapter, Eve met up with the serpent and soon thereafter she started thinking maybe there is **just one thing** that would make PARADISE even better. She was **skeptical** of God...who had said, "I give you PARADISE; but don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden or you will die." Remember the serpent's counter offer? "You won't die. You'll become like God." And Eve interpreted the serpent's information to mean, "Maybe there's an appeals process." "I know God said, 'Don't eat from the tree!'; but maybe that's not exactly what God meant." She acted on temptation...she took an offer that seemed too good to refuse (Adam too)...she took the bait...accepted an invitation to play God. You know how the story goes, right? They're desire to play God brought them SHAME. Their eyes *were* opened; but it was too much too handle. They wound up SELF-CONSCIOUS, hiding from God behind fig leaves. Ashamed. Skeptical. Self-conscious. Hiding from God.

Think about your own life...times when you've been **ashamed**. Maybe you made a bad personal decision that brought you low. Maybe you didn't persist in prayer and took what seemed like a spiritual short-cut. Maybe you weren't as loving as you could have been in a particular situation – not as honest, perhaps. This feeling of shame is not limited to our childhood years – it visits us even into adulthood.

Think about your own **skepticism**...about God...pessimism about the current world stage...where at times it seems like goodness is in short supply. Who can contemplate PARADISE when Jena, Louisiana and Cheshire, Connecticut crowd into our consciousness? It's easier to be skeptical than faithful.

And who isn't **self-conscious** at times? Who doesn't want to be better in God's sight today than you were yesterday? Who doesn't want washboard abs and buns of steel...who hasn't had a bad hair day...or a no hair day? It's hard enough to *grow up* let alone *keep up* with calories, cholesterol and carbohydrates! It's enough to make you hide yourself away from your neighbor and from God behind masks and fig leaves.

Everybody, and I mean everybody, has been at this particular square one. We've been **ashamed** of our behavior and outlook. We've been **skeptical** – tempted to give God guidance rather than receive it. We've felt **self-conscious** about our shortcomings. Everybody has had his or her turn at HIDING FROM GOD.

So, if we've got a common problem (hiding from God), maybe we can find a common response...right here in these three short verses. This is the Old Testament; but there is some good news here.

The first thing is that God **SHOWS UP**. I love that the story-teller depicts God as coming to the garden at the time of the evening breeze -- not as a terror in the middle of the night – not as an agitation first thing in the morning. And the author doesn't try to tell us what God looks like...just that God's PRESENCE visited the Garden. This all-powerful, all-knowing God of the entire universe paid them a personal visit. They heard the SOUND of the Lord God...not they SAW the Lord God; but they heard the sound...of strolling bare feet, perhaps. Or can we imagine that God WAS the evening breeze blowing through the Garden – touching every leaf of every tree, knowing about and caring for each and everything in PARADISE. God created everything; but God didn't move on. God continued to **show up** in those first few yesterdays.

The other good news is that God **LOOKS OUT**. That simple question, “Where are you?” in verse 9. I wonder what that sounded like...what did the author have in mind? Sometimes I like to imagine that God asked in the same way that a parent asks after a child, even though the parent already knows. My daughter likes to hide from me and she always starts off in plain sight (I mean, I see her and she sees me) and then she runs and “hides” behind my wife. It’s totally ridiculous; but I pretend that I can’t really see her. I say, “Where are you...?” The point of the game is not that she successfully hide herself from me. The point is that I *look for her!* Adam and God probably both knew that hiding is a game. I/we have played the same game with God. The point of the game...the good news is that God LOOKS OUT for us.

And finally, God **LISTENS UP**. The omnipotent God...the omniscient God...gave Adam an ear. The God who fashioned Adam, named Adam, who breathed life into Adam and who knew Adam’s every thought before Adam could think it (let alone speak it) listened to Adam’s explanation. “I heard you,” Adam said. “I was afraid because I’m not very good at playing God. So...I hid myself.” There were consequences that followed. That’s another sermon for another time. But, right there at square one...in the face of their shame, skepticism and self-consciousness, God listened up.

Just for today, friends, we don't have to PLAY GOD or HIDE FROM GOD. Just for today, we can LET GOD BE GOD. Since Eden and for eternity, God will keep **showing up**. From square one to September 23, 2007, God has been **looking out** for you. During the first few yesterdays until this very moment...God is **listening to you!**