

Where are You? Where is God?

Genesis 3:8-15, Mark 3:20-35

“Where *are* you?” That’s the question someone might ask when he goes to St. John’s today at 10:00 and discovers that no one is there – because we’re out here at McClumpha Park for our outdoor service and picnic. “Where *are* you?” That’s the question God asks the man in our first lesson today when we meet them all playing “Hide and Seek” in the garden. Maybe *we’ll* play “Hide and Seek” this afternoon too. Interestingly, this is the first question in the Bible. “Where are you?” And it’s not what one would *think* might be the first question in the Bible, is it? What would you think the first question in the Bible might be? Maybe “Where is *God*?” But probably not “Where are *you*?” It makes me wonder if religion, might really be about God searching for *us* rather than *us* searching for God.ⁱ

The literary critic Harold Bloom wrote his own version of this story. It’s called “The Story of J.” J is the abbreviation for the Jahwist, one of the authors of the book of Genesis. Bloom thinks this tale of *paradise lost* is “a children’s story that ends unhappily. When we were children,” he says, “We were terribly punished for being children.” The man and woman may have been terribly punished.ⁱⁱ But in the grand scheme of things, this story tells us that in the conflict between evil and humanity, humanity will finally win. It’s become known as the first proclamation of the gospel or good news in the Bible. That is why, at Christmas when the service of nine lessons and carols is broadcast from the chapel of King’s College, Cambridge, this story of *paradise lost* is the first of the lessons read.ⁱⁱⁱ

There’s a friend of St. John’s who would agree with Harold Bloom. If you read the *Journey Pages* this week, you know that we had a surprise visitor a week ago Friday. That was David Trautman, the architect who designed and built St. John’s in 1958, when he was fresh out of architecture school at the University of Michigan and there was nothing along Sheldon Rd. but farmland. We had a lovely visit together. He kept saying, “There are four things that have made all the difference for me – three c’s and an s: creativity, curiosity, capriciousness (or changeability), and the s is spontaneity. Those things, even though it has been often said that we should give them away when we are children, be done with them, they are childish things -- those four things have kept me going. Those are *inside* of you, you don’t look *outside* for it, you don’t have to listen to anybody for it. You can go to church and it can be a great part of your life but there’s still a part of you that comes from inside of you. It’s not out there. So look for it inside of you.” “AND,” he said, “be aware that you might be scared of what you find. But it’s all good. You betcha I think so.”

Today when we meet Jesus *he’s* engaging in all those things -- as he often is: creativity, curiosity, capriciousness, and spontaneity. And what kind of a response does he get? Well we’re in the Gospel of Mark now. In Mark there is no birth story – no annunciation, no census, no shepherds and angels, no wise men. The first time we meet Jesus’ mother in the Gospel of Mark is in today’s Gospel in chapter 3. She’s rubbing shoulders with all the others around. They think he’s out of his mind. And the religious leaders think he’s in cahoots with the devil.

The *issue* in our *Gospel* today is actually another *question*. That question, when we read between the lines, is “Who is this Jesus and where does he come from?” And another question: “What’s the source of his power?” His family and the religious leaders seem to have a lot of anxiety around this. But Jesus is clear about it. Jesus knows who he is. Jesus knows the source of his power. Unlike the man and the woman in our first reading, who represent *all* of us (The word “adam” means humankind, and “Eve” means mother of all the living”) Jesus has learned not to hide from God. He doesn’t need to hide from that eternal love that is at the heart of the universe. So he is free to live creatively, curiously, capriciously, and spontaneously. Jesus came to teach us, to show us, that *we* don’t need to hide from that love either. And God in that love frees us to embrace creativity, curiosity,

capriciousness and spontaneity. It is such a blessing that we have children among us who haven't learned to hide from God yet either. The children of St. John's can help teach us along with Jesus.

This makes me think of my dog. Sometimes he tries to hide from me, especially if he gets the idea it's time for a bath. So he'll crawl under our bed. And his back two paws will be sticking out from underneath the bedskirt. He thinks if he can't see *me* then I can't see him either. I wonder if we humans do that with God. And then in our anxiety we think God is nowhere to be found. But how can a fish swim away from the ocean? How can a bird fly away from the sky? How can man and woman hide -- from *God*?

If you've been to a centering prayer workshop at St. John's you know that I have an app on my cell phone that I use when I do centering prayer. Here's what my app says right now. It's a quote from Julian of Norwich: "God is closer to us than our own soul, for he is the foundation on which our soul stands, and he is the means which keeps the substance and the sensuality together, so that they will never separate. For our soul sits in God in true rest, and our soul stands in God in sure strength, and our soul is naturally rooted in God in endless love."^{iv} (Showings) Yesterday at the Discovery Process workshop on internal context, Laurie and Becky put it this way. They had a poster on an easel that said, "Always seek the grace, the light, because it is there."

So today, with the man and the woman hiding in the trees, God invites us to surrender to that endless love. Imagine that scene in the *Wizard of Oz* where the witch writes in the sky, "Surrender Dorothy." Maybe you want to turn the tables and ask God, "Where are *you*?" Maybe it seems to you that God is nowhere. Here's an image I'm going to leave with you to help you remember. If you want to know where God is, it may just be a matter of your perspective. Look at these letters:

G O D I S N O W H E R E

What do you see? God is nowhere? *Maybe* you just need to make one minor adjustment:

G O D I S N O W H E R E

We are given a sign of God's presence and promise today in a simple fragment of bread, in a simple sip of wine. In the community gathered today and every Sunday, around Word and Sacrament. In the relationships we share when the Christ in you meets the Christ in me. God is nowhere? God is now here. May it be so. Amen.

Pastor Dana Runestad

10 June 2018

Third Sunday after Pentecost ~ Year B Proper 5

ⁱ John Rollefson, "Lectionary 10, Proper 5," in Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary Year B, Eugene, Oregon, Resource Publications (Wipf and Stock Publishers), 2016, p. 94

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Reginald Fuller, "Tenth Sunday of the Year B" Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1984, p. 311.

^{iv} Julian of Norwich, Showings, <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-mobile-app>