

Genesis 3:8-15

Three of the most wonderful, kind words which could ever be spoken are...what would you say?... “I love you?” How about, “God loves you,” or “Jesus died for you?” No, that’s four. You might disagree with me, but to me, three of the kindest, most loving words which can ever be spoken were spoken by God in the Garden to Adam and Eve. “Where are you?” He said these words after they sinned. He said these words because they were hiding from Him among the trees. At the time when God spoke these three words, Adam and Eve did not consider them to be kind words at all. The words frightened them. They wanted no part of God anymore. Now that they had disobeyed Him, the sound of His voice was the last sound they wanted to hear.

It was not this way before. Before they listened to the voice of Satan, they loved hearing the voice of God. But not anymore. Now God’s voice terrified them. Now they only wanted to hide from God. And it’s not because God had changed. They had. They did what was wrong, and they knew it.

That’s how it is still today. We hide from God because we have disobeyed Him. Children disobey God by disobeying parents, and they withdraw. Like Adam and Eve, they hide among the trees--in their room, with their friends, anywhere, as long as it’s away from their parents. Adults, too, are always running away from God. Why do you think His House draws so few on Sunday mornings? We give all sorts of excuses, but the true reason is that we’re out there with Adam and Eve hiding among the trees. Hearing the voice of God is the last thing we want to do when we know we have disobeyed Him.

What if God were to treat us the way that we treat Him? Adam and Eve wanted God to leave them alone. We often behave the same way. What if God wanted us to leave Him alone? No coming to Him with our prayers pouring out all our needs. No laying our head down on our pillow at night knowing that He is watching over us. Baptism would be without any meaning. Without Christ, it would be simply an outward washing with water, no different from a bath at home. The Lord’s Supper would be nothing but a mere symbol. Just bread and wine for the stomach and nothing for our soul’s salvation if God were to leave us alone. Were God to treat us the way we so often treat Him...were He to leave us alone and want nothing to do with us, our lives would be a living hell.

How foolish of Adam and Eve to hide among the trees of the Garden. That’s where the Serpent was lurking. They belonged to him now. There were now in the devil’s kingdom. And there they, with all their children--including you and me--would remain forever except that God spoke these three words: “Where are you?” He would not wash His hands of them. He knew what was coming. He knew that Cain would kill his brother, and that this would be just the beginning. God knew the hatred, and violence, and rape that was coming. He knew that more than 600,000 men would die in our Civil War. He knew that World War I was coming, and World War II, and Vietnam, and terrorism, and abortion. And He knew that in the year 2012 so few would even know of His love. So few would gather together in His House to worship Him.

But God did not leave Adam and Eve, and all their children to live...no, to die alone without Him. He did not wash His hands of them, and of us, and of the sinful world in which we live. “Where are you?” He called. But He did not speak these three words for His own sake. He knew exactly where they were. He knew exactly what they had done. God spoke these words for their sake. And He speaks them today for your sake. “Where are you?” God calls out to you today. “Where are you?” It’s not that He is in need of knowing where you are. He sees us among the trees in our hiding places. He wants you to know...He wants you to consider just exactly where you really are.

You and I are mastered by everything within us and around us. We are mastered, controlled, by our anger, our lust, our pride. We are mastered by the way our friends behave. If they walk away from God, we follow right after them. We are mastered by our desire to make money--lots of it. By our desire to be popular. Adam and Eve were mastered by the Serpent. That's where they were when God called to them, and that's where we are too. Will you admit this? Will you confess that you are living a life that is out of control? That sin and Satan have mastered you and there is nothing you and I can do to put things right again?

Adam and Eve blamed each other, and they blamed God. Who do you blame? Spouse? Parent? Pastor? We blame God, too, don't we? And who does God blame? He blamed His Son, Jesus Christ. That's right! When God told Adam and Eve about the Seed of the woman who would come to destroy the works of the devil, God was taking the blame. His Son would be struck by Satan. His heel would be bruised. He would suffer and die on a cross. Jesus was blamed by the Chief Priests, and Pharisees, and by Pontius Pilate. And He was blamed by God. God sent Jesus to take the blame for what Adam and Eve had done, for what you have done. He offered no defense. He opened not His mouth. He took your blame, your sin, your guilt, your punishment. Jesus allowed Himself to be mastered by death. He died for you.

But now He lives. And when you call out from your distress, "God, where are you?" Jesus says: Here I am in the water of Baptism for you. Wherever you go in life, you carry Christ with you, for you are baptized into Him. When you call out from within the clutches of your guilt, "God, where are you?" Jesus says: Here I am in the bread and wine of the Sacrament for you. He does not hide from you. He comes to you with mercy and forgiveness, for this is His promise: "Take eat...Take drink...My and body and blood...for the remission of your sins."

Adam and Eve hid in the wrong place. They hid among the trees of the Garden. But God found them and promised them that a tree was coming--a tree upon which His Son would die, and under that tree every sinner may truly hide. Hide yourself in Jesus' cross, and your sins cannot find you there, for you are forgiven. Hide yourself in Jesus' cross, and Satan cannot master you anymore. He is defeated by Him who died on that cross for you. Hide yourself in the tree of Christ Jesus, and there God always knows where you are--safe with Him, your Savior--today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.