

“Where are you?” When we ask this question, it’s for our benefit; to learn the whereabouts of the one we are seeking. When God asks this question, it is not for His benefit, but for ours. In the garden these words come to the ears of the man. He does not respond, “I’m over here by the fig tree.” Rather, he says, *“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.”*

God knows where Adam is hiding. And He knows why he is hiding. The question, *“Where are you?”* is for Adam’s sake. He is being given the opportunity to confess his sin; to admit that where he is, is not where he should be.

Sin, by its nature, is a turning away from God. To sin is to withdraw from God and flee from Him. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve were joyful and content to be in the presence of God. They did not shrink from Him and attempt to hide. But then they fell into sin and everything changed. Now they were in dread of God. They were more terrified of God than they were of Satan!

This is bad, but it can get worse. And it’s because of how sin works and keeps working. The farther one withdraws from God, the farther he still desires to withdraw, so that he will continue to flee from God and avoid Him forever.

But because God has a merciful heart, He calls out, *“Where are you?”* He must confront the man and his wife or they will keep running and hiding.

Friend, we were born in sin. We were born turned away from God. This would have been our state forever except that, in mercy, God turned toward us in Holy Baptism. He saw us in our hiding place, and He came to where we were through the precious water and word of the Sacrament. He cheered our hearts. He forgave our sin. He turned us toward Himself in love. And even more, He made the promise that no matter how much, or how great our sin, He will not forsake us and turn away from us, and He will continue to seek us to bring us back to Him.

You see, sin continues to work in us. Even the baptized struggle with sin. Even the baptized can, and do turn away from God and withdraw from Him. Even you and me, even we have it within us to flee from God and avoid Him. And so, even to the baptized God must continue to call out: *“Where are you?”*

He knows where we are. He wants us to confess our sin when it has us in its grasp. He wants to hear from us: “I am not where I should be. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

Adam could not say this. God gave him the opportunity to confess his sin...twice! He could not and he did not. But this is because Adam and Eve did not know yet that God loves to forgive the sinner. All they knew was that they had sinned, and that the sinner must die. And so, they were terrified of God. They did not know, yet, what you know – that *“if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Had they known this, wouldn't they have confessed their sin to God? You and I do know this. We know the sweet words that God then spoke in the garden. These words: *"I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

We know that Jesus was born of the woman according to this promise; that He crushed Satan's head by His death and resurrection. And we know what that means for us – that God, for Jesus' sake, forgives sin, all sin; that He declares the sinner to be forgiven. And so, there is no reason for us to flee from God, to avoid Him and hide from Him.

Now it is true that when we come here on Sundays, we are confronted by God: "Where are you? Where have you been? Do not hide your sin from Me. Confess it to Me." We do not like to hear this word from God anymore than Adam liked to hear it. But friend, you know God's heart; Adam did not. Yes, you have been where you should not have been. You have done what you should not have done, and so have I. Do not avoid God because of this. Do not allow your sin to make you flee from God. *"Enter His presence with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise,"* because there is nothing you have done that God will not forgive. There is no place you have been where God is ashamed to come and reclaim you for Himself.

*"I was afraid,"* Adam told God, *"because I was naked."* And yes, he was. He and his wife covered their physical nakedness with fig leaves. And they tried to cover their spiritual nakedness with excuses. But no excuse can truly cover our sin and shame.

My friend, there is no need for you to be afraid because you are not naked before God. Jesus covers you with His innocence. Your baptism is proof of this. Your sins are washed away. Jesus' blood cleanses you of all sin. He took your sin and your shame. He bore it all on the cross. And He gave you, in your baptism, His perfect righteousness. In this holiness you stand before God, not naked, and so, not afraid. And therefore, you do not need to attempt to cover yourself with excuses. When you sin, do not hide it from God. Confess it, for He freely forgives you.

*"Where are you?"* is God's question to us. But we can also ask this question of Him. "God, where are You?" And He delights in telling us. "I am in the bloody wounds in Jesus' hands and side. I am in the sweet water of your baptism. I am in the bread and wine on the altar for you. I am in the comforting word of absolution that your pastor announces to you." Your God is in all these holy things to cover you with Christ so that you never feel the need to flee from Him. Your God is in all these things for your forgiveness. He is not ashamed of you. He covers your spiritual nakedness. He forgives your sin.

If you feel like hiding, then hide in your baptism into Christ Jesus. You can hide there because there you are with Jesus. Adam and Eve hid among the trees of the garden. That didn't work. The tree of Jesus' cross is in your baptism. Hide there from the evil foe. For in your baptism, you do not hide from God; you hide yourself in Him. Amen.