

+ Genesis 3:8-15 + Where Are You? + 3rd Sunday after Pentecost + 5 June 2016 +

Experts in child development call it “*object permanence*” or “*the understanding that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be observed.*”¹ It’s considered a major step in the cognitive development of children. We’ve actually all been through that step, and many of us have helped kids reach that step. How? Playing Peekaboo.

Ever play Peekaboo with a little one—an infant, a baby, a toddler? Their reactions are all a little different. If you play it with an infant or a young baby, they may start crying or completely lose attention. Why? They think you’re gone. Where’s mom? Where’s dad? Where’s grandma or grandpa? You see, the minds of such little ones haven’t developed enough yet to realize that even if they can’t see your face, you’re still there.

Once they get older, they figure it out and Peekaboo becomes a fun game that ends up with lots of silly giggles. Now for toddlers, you have to take the game to another level. It becomes more about the surprise than your “reappearance.” On the other hand, a toddler might think that if he covers his eyes, then you won’t see him. It’s amazing how the Lord develops the human mind even by just playing Peekaboo.

Are there ever times when it seems like you’re playing Peekaboo with God? Do you ever find yourself acting or thinking like a spiritual infant—thinking that because you can’t see God, he can’t see you or what you’re doing? Maybe you take the spiritual toddler approach and you cover your eyes and ears trying to convince yourself that God can’t possibly notice what you’re doing or what you’ve failed to do. Maybe it’s more a game of Hide and Seek. “If I do this in the shadows or the darkness or at night or away from others, God is so busy surely he won’t notice what I’m doing.”

As you heard Genesis 3 earlier, did you get the impression that Adam and Eve were doing that? You have the jewel of God’s creation—man and woman, who earlier in the day had been perfect. They were fully developed in mind, body, and soul. Their thoughts, words, and actions perfectly mirrored God’s holy will. Yet where do you find them in the cool of the day? Hiding in the bushes wearing fig leaves they sewed together.

Now stop and think about that for a moment. Why were they hiding? Who were they hiding from? Why were they wearing such ridiculous clothing? Backtrack a few verses and you find all kinds of answers.

Adam and Eve had been walking through the Garden of Eden, enjoying God’s glorious creation and tending to the garden, but as they were walking they came across that one tree in the middle of the garden. When God in his wisdom created Adam, he had given Adam a single command. “**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.**” (Genesis 2:16-17) Any tree in the garden was fair game, except that one. “Adam, reserve that one for me. By not eating from it, you will show your love for me. You will worship me by not eating from that tree.”

After the Lord in his love created Eve, Adam had told her about that one tree. So far they had avoided that tree until the day they walked past it and saw something strange. Up in that tree was a serpent—and the serpent spoke to them. “**Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’**” (Genesis 3:1) Of course he didn’t. Now the fact that the serpent even spoke to Eve and Adam should’ve set off all kinds of warning bells. This was no ordinary snake, but one possessed by God’s enemy, the fallen angel Satan. Now Eve did provide an excellent response to Satan’s attempt to fill their holy minds with doubt, but he didn’t give up with her first defense.

No, he poured on the lies. “**You will not surely die...For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” (Genesis 3:4-5) Why exactly would holy people want to know what evil is? They had a perfect relationship with God, each other, and creation! Yet Eve ignored those holy warning bells and ate the fruit. She gave some to her husband, who stood there thinking nothing was wrong.

It’s at that point when the two people with perfect, pristine DNA and all the brilliance of God’s holy knowledge and wisdom in their minds started acting like immature, foolish children. They used their brilliance to cover shame, which hadn’t been a problem before—and they used that brilliance to make clothing...out of fig leaves. There’s nothing comfortable about fig leaf clothing. Then they hid in the bushes when they heard the Lord coming.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object_permanence

Why was God coming to them in the cool of the day? Every day he went on a walk with them and it had been glorious—no fear, no shame, no guilt, just holy joy, but they would have that joy no more. They knew that they could not be in God's presence if he found them. So they tried playing a twisted game of Peekaboo with the Lord. If he doesn't see us, then he won't know we're here. It was a response of fear and foolishness. Unlike infants and babies who don't know better, our first parents did it intentionally.

It got worse when God asked them, **"Where are you?"** God gave Adam and Eve an opportunity to confess their sins to him. Yes, there was the penalty of death attached to eating from that one tree, but the holy God is also a gracious Lord. Obviously the all-knowing God knew where they were, but he wanted them to repent, to turn from their sins and live. So the LORD God gave them that opportunity, but what did they do?

Adam had an answer, but he wasn't about to 'fess up to what happened, even though it had been his responsibility to teach Eve God's command. It had been his responsibility to keep her and himself away from that tree. Surely Adam had enough smarts to know not to interact with deceptive serpents in trees, let alone Satan, but as you and I so often do—like foolish, immature children—Adam did everything he could to pass the blame. **"The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it."** What a foolish response from one so wise!

Adam practically pushes Eve out from the bushes so she can take the bullet for him. He claimed that he had no choice in eating that fruit. Really, Adam? Worst of all, he doesn't just blame Eve. He blames God. **"The woman YOU put here with me..."** "God, it's your fault I'm in this mess!" Oh, Adam!

Adam wasn't about to confess his sins before the Lord, so God asked Eve, **"What is this you have done?"** Eve's response is as full of fear and shame and foolishness as Adam's. **"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."** "God, I had no choice. The snake fooled me. I had to eat the fruit."

So what does God do? He had every right to wipe Adam and Eve off the face of the earth. He rightfully could've put them to death and sent them to hell at that moment, but instead, the Lord punished the serpent and confronted his enemy Satan. **"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And, Satan, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."**

In the verses that follow, the Lord lays out the very real consequences for this not-so-silly game that Adam and Eve tried playing. Pain and sorrow, trouble and toil, hardship and woe and death were coming, but God never pronounced the word **"cursed"** on his foolish, yet beloved children. No, he indirectly gave them a promise, which he spoke directly to Satan.

"Satan, I'm going to destroy what you've done. You've turned my beloved children against me. I'm going to make them your enemies, and this is how I'm going to do it. Yes, I'm about to reveal my master salvation plan, but try as you might, you won't be able to stop it. I'm going to send a Savior, born of a human mother—yet true God, and he's going to crush your head. Satan, you know what happens to snakes when you crush their heads? Yeah, I thought so. You're going to bite his heel. He's going to suffer. He's even going to die, but your victory will be brief and that Seed of the Woman will stand triumphant with you crushed beneath his feet." Adam and Eve could stop hiding and stand before the Lord because forgiveness was coming.

God's question echoes down through the ages, **"Where are you?"** When God in his holiness calls you to repent, to confess your sins, to turn from your sins and live, where are you? Hiding in the bushes with your first parents covered in the uncomfortable pain of shame and guilt? Hiding in the bushes with your first parents filled with terror and fear? Why? You know that God in his holiness is right—and you deserve to be punished for the evil you have done or the good you have failed to do. Your conscience tells you that God knows what you have done in secret, what you have thought in your heart of hearts, what you have done in your past. God knows and so he asks where you are. Are you hiding? Or maybe you prefer to play the blame game. It's not my fault. It's my parents' fault. It's my spouse's fault. It's my family's fault. It's society's fault. It's not mine. Yet God knows that it is.

So the Lord calls out again, **"Where are you?"** He wants to speak with you. He wants you to step into the light, to be open with him and honestly confess it all, to honestly confess that you are responsible for what you have done or failed to do—and yes, you deserve all the consequences. Yet the same Lord, who calls you to repent, holds out for you a promise—the Woman's Seed, the Savior who came, who bore our humanity and crushed the power of Satan with his nail-pierced feet.

Isn't that a better place to be than behind the bushes or pointing a blaming finger? Isn't it always better to be with Jesus, embraced by his unconditional love and by faith embracing his forgiveness and grace? Isn't that where we need to be—with Jesus? If God knows even when you don't see him, then you need to be with Jesus, but where can you find him? You can't see his face. Is this another game of Peekaboo with God?

If you want to know where to find Jesus, open your Bible like the hands of a parent revealing their face and there you see Jesus. Go to the font and see the handfuls of water splashed over your head and see Jesus revealed. Come to the Lord's Table where the pastor places into your hand or mouth the body of Christ with bread and the blood of Christ with wine and see Jesus revealed. Pay attention during the confession of sins and let it all out. Hear again that precious promise, ***"As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins..."*** See Jesus revealed!

"Where are you?" You have no need to hide, no need to cover your face, no need to be ashamed or fearful. Jesus is really here with you through his Word and Sacraments—and that's the best place to be. Amen.