

3rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
June 10, 2018

Text: Genesis 3:8-15

Theme: Where Are You?

Two weeks ago I flew into Chicago and met my brother who flew in from San Francisco. We planned a trip to reconnect with our family members who still live in Illinois. It was fun to be back in Chicago. It was wonderful to step foot on the campus of my alma mater, Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. But it was in Rock Falls that we really went down memory lane. We drove past the house where my grandparents settled after they moved off the farm. We stopped in front of the house where my uncle and his family lived. And my brother and I discovered the exact location where we all recalled (without a single hesitation) the one day that we experienced the absolute fury of my father.

Where were we? On this particular day my cousins took us to the edge of the Rock River which was only a block from their home. Under their guidance we each climbed over this cement barrier that was blocking our path forward. Once over the barrier all five of us lined up single file to walk out on this two-foot wide block which led us straight towards the rushing waters of the dam. It was quite the adventure for me and my brother! We could never do something like that in the suburbs of Chicago. But before we reached our destination we heard the voice of my father screaming to us back by the cement barrier. In no uncertain terms we were to turn around slowly and come back immediately.

We have never seen my dad so furious before or after that day.

Once on shore my dad started: One misstep and we would have been sucked under those rushing waters. We had no business climbing over that barrier. What were we thinking?

Of course I pleaded complete innocence. After all, I was the youngest one in the bunch at the tender age of seven. I simply took the lead of our cousins. Surely everyone knew it was their fault.

In the sermon last week, Deacon Erin explained to us how comforting it is to have rules in our lives so we know the direction we are to take. During the message to the children, it was Bruce who said that when we do not follow the rules then somebody might get hurt.

As my family sat around the dinner table we enjoyed recounting the incident at the Rock River because none of us got hurt. Our punishment was severe enough but I most remember the pain that we caused my father. In his anger we heard his fear. I know now that if my granddaughter (who just turned seven) even thought about doing something like that I would be just as frightened and scared.

Where are you? These are the very first words in Scripture that God spoke to humankind. Prior to that question, the woman ate of the tree in the middle of the garden (the forbidden tree) and then offered the same to her husband. Once their eyes were opened and they noticed they were standing naked they clothed themselves and hid from God. And when God searched for them and then discovered them, they started in with their excuses. The man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent.

In just a few brief verses we discover the nature of sin. It starts with a simple temptation that sounds so attractive that we cannot refuse it. We take that first bite (or climb over that first barrier) and when we look around we notice that nothing has changed and everything is still okay. So we take the next step and keep our eyes on the adventure ahead of us only to be stopped in our tracks when we catch ourselves (or someone else catches us in the act). Only then do we become vulnerable and see our nakedness and want to hide.

The last thing that the woman and her husband wanted to do was to have a conversation with God. And the last thing I wanted to do was to have a conversation with my father.

Sin opens us up and exposes us. Not only do we have rules to follow to keep us on the right path but in our lesson today God also reminds us that when we break the rules we have to face him. And (yes) there are consequences for our behavior. In the case of those in the garden, the serpent will henceforth be forever cursed and the woman will henceforth feel the pangs of childbirth and the man will

henceforth sweat as he works through the thistles and thorns to make the ground bear fruit.

Where are you? God is looking for us.

Do we understand how futile it is to hide from God?

But this is where I become extremely excited because even in Genesis 3 we see God already at work on our behalf. Yes, we pay a price for our decisions but we do not have to hide from God because God never leaves us without a sense of hope. God already knows what the woman and her husband have done but he still searches for them. Even when they are unable to name their sin God opens up a conversation with them so they can *see* what they are unable to *confess*. God weeds through the blame game and establishes new boundaries.

And when I read beyond verse 15 I am in awe of our God. Yes, women will feel the pang of childbirth but women will also have the joy of holding that child once it is born. Yes, men will sweat as they work through the thistles and thorns of the ground but at the end of the season they will have food on their table. Yes, at the end of our lives we will return to the ground but God has a plan that will offer us eternal life.

We live in a world that is quick to blame others when something goes wrong. We look outside of ourselves because we certainly cannot be held responsible. We plead our complete innocence and wash our hands clean. But today is the day we are invited to come out of hiding and to face the God who loves us unconditionally. Today is the day to cast aside our pride and name our sin and tell God that in spite of our behavior it is our desire to follow his voice and his ways. And when we see ourselves tempted to do something that we know is not good or healthy or right for us then we should stop right there in our tracks and listen to the voice of God say to us: *Where are you?* And then turn around slowly and come back to God immediately.

God offers this question in order to open a conversation with us. It is more than okay to expose ourselves to God and not put the blame on others. We can own what we need to own and let God put his healing salve upon our wounds.

It is true that the woman and her husband were banned from the Garden of Eden. But before the Lord cast them out he made garments for them. They were given a new land and from them children were conceived. In the rest of Scripture God unfolds a love story that always brings his people back into his grace and mercy. We must not doubt. We must not hide in fear. The serpent will always seduce us into believing that we can be just like God. Resist such temptations.

Every time we encounter an opportunity to walk towards the Rock River dam we need to stop ourselves at the barrier and hear the voice of God say to us – *Where are you?*

God is seeking us and there is no need to hide. Amen