

June 6, 2021 Pentecost 2B
Genesis 3:8-15
Where are You?

One of my fondest memories growing up was summer nights playing a version of hide and seek that we called "Kick the Can." On Normandy Avenue, where I lived, we had 20+ kids all within a few years of each other. Kids would come from neighboring blocks and some night we would have as many as 30 kids playing the game. One person would be "It." They would close their eyes and count to 30 while everyone else hid. The "It" person would attempt to find us and call out "1-2-3 on Chris in the Taylor's bushes." Then Chris would be captured. If someone could sneak in and kick the can without getting caught, all the captured people went free.

This was our activity most summer nights and a part of my childhood that I cherish. I recall it today because of Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden in our Old Testament lesson and God calling out "Where are you?"

By the time our reading begins in verse eight, the serpent (who by the way is never identified as Satan in the story—we have to wait for the book of Revelation to find that out) has already deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God's command. Now they are engaged in a hide and seek game of their own—and the stakes are high.

As they hunker down in the garden like children attempting to hide their trespasses, God seeks after them, fully aware that something has gone very, very wrong.

We listen as God calls out to them, "Where are you?"

This is the first question that God asks in Scripture and, as is the case with every good story, it is asked not just of the characters on the page and in the scene, but of every single one of us.

At once, the question assumes an answer—**we are not where we should be**—and poses yet another question—**where should we be?**

The last one hundred years have been marked by the exponential growth and sophistication of technology. The world is undoubtedly more connected than ever, but it may also be more distracted than ever. Scientists have long warned about the dangers of getting distracted by technology. When left unchecked, it can distract us from everything from our ability to have meaningful face-to-face conversations, to keeping our eyes on the road and off our screens as we drive.

So it is with our lives of faith.

In his commentary on the Book of Genesis, Walter Brueggemann suggests that the serpent in the Garden of Eden is the world's first theologian because it is the serpent who convinces humankind to exchange obedience to God for theology about God. If we think about God narrowly enough, we can distract ourselves into believing that we can think our way to salvation. Our knowledge becomes a means of self-preservation and protection, rather than a means of transmitting and communicating faith in the living God and being known by love, living by faith and being a voice of hope.

And yet, God cuts through our words and ideas, persistently calling out to us, "Where are you?"

In the same way, when moments of tension invariably arise in our communities of faith, instead of turning to prayer and patient discernment, we get distracted by arguments and anxieties and self-interests, and so we take our ball (or our can) and go home. We cut ourselves off from community and, in turn, we short-circuit the possibility of reconciliation.

God's voice calls out after us as we stomp away, "Where are you?"

In order for us to consider this question, we must discern deeply as to where we are in relation to where God is inviting us. Discernment, though, is tricky. Much has been written about discernment, but decidedly less attention is afforded to the actual vocation of discernment.

One place to start is to take account of all that distracts us from living lives of faithfulness. Distractions may look different for different folks, but their central characteristic is the same: they draw our attention away from focusing on the life-giving parts of our lives.

We can become distracted from our relationships with friends and family, and even from our romantic partners. Work that once brought much joy to our lives can become distorted by the desire for position and power, influence and wealth. Even our days of rest and vacation can become muddled with concerns about what we might be missing at work or in the world. All these things distract us from the places in our lives that afford us peace and joy and love, and ultimately, they distract us from our life before God.

But we as individuals aren't the only ones who can become distracted; our churches and communities of faith can get distracted, too. One way that churches become distracted is by focusing on innovation rather than faithfulness. When churches focus on innovation, they define themselves by their programs and ministries, rather than by their witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. They focus on the building rather than the builder.

Another way that churches can become distracted is by focusing on entertainment rather than transformation. When churches focus on entertainment, it is almost as if they exist in a vacuum. Walk in the doors, and it is as if you've entered another dimension, completely cut off from the cares and concerns of the real world. Here, the sky is always blue, the water is always calm, and the boat is never rocked. Sermons are as soft and as sweet as cream puffs, offering more self-help than Gospel. When churches fall into the trap of offering individual members a custom-ordered faith—sanding off every jagged edge and smoothing out every rough place—they possess about as much transformative power as the society club at prayer.

The possibilities for getting distracted in our lives, and particularly our lives of faith, are many. But the Good News is that ours is a God who, no matter

where we wander or try and hide, relentlessly pursues us, calling out after us, "Where are you?" and inviting us back to Himself.

It's never a good idea to hide from God. It is never to our benefit. I recall as a child being forced to go shopping with my mom. I didn't want to go. So I paid her back for making me go. I went and hid in a clothes rack. Eventually she noticed I was missing. She started calling my name. I stayed in the clothes rack laughing a little and happy with myself. Eventually she panicked and started searching the store. I continued to be satisfied with my vengeance. Well, eventually I had to come out. And when I did, the whole event did not work out to my benefit.

Adam and Eve, in their high stakes game of hide and seek in the garden, were hiding from God from fear of punishment. But what they didn't realize is that God had no desire to punish. God's plan was to forgive and redeem and reconcile. He knew their sin and wanted to redeem it.

This Garden of Eden story is also the story of the lost sheep where the Shepherd goes searching to bring the lost one back into the fold. This Garden of Eden story is the story of the Cross where God goes searching out the lost sinners like us, not so that He can punish, but so that he can take the punishment upon Himself and forgive and redeem and reconcile.

This week God has places for you to be. When you are not there, I pray that you will hear His voice calling out "Where are you?" and inviting you back into His presence and into His grace.