

Search and rescue operations are ongoing in Guatemala as we speak. You might have heard the news this week, about the volcano that erupted there last week – Volcano Fuego. This one was worse than the ones in Hawaii recently. It was sudden and more explosive, and sent high speed flows of gas, ash, and debris in every direction, overwhelming people in the streets and trapping people in their houses. 200 or so people are still missing, which means that search and rescue efforts are underway as we speak. Volunteers with pick-axes and shovels are digging through debris, looking for lost loved ones.

Can you imagine how foolish it would be if, trapped in the rubble, you didn't want to be found? If search and rescue workers arrived, and you tried to stay hidden from them?

I mention it this morning because we see something similar in Genesis chapter three. Really, it's the first search and rescue mission in history, and the most important one. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, have just trusted the devil instead of God and eaten the fruit God forbade. They aren't innocent victims in the disaster they found themselves in; they're the ones to blame for it. But the tragic irony is that we see them trying to hide from God – the one who's come to rescue them!

But here's the thing: It's not just them. A look at this tragic scene in the garden is like looking in the mirror. We are our first parents' kids; these sinners, too, still try to hide from God. Thankfully, the search and rescue operation God began in the garden is ongoing in your life and mine, and it hinges on the question God asked: Where are you? 1) A question God asks to uncover our sin. 2) A question God asks so he can cover our sin.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “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.**

**¹⁵ And 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.”**

I. *A question God asks to uncover our sin*

The devil had promised them that if they ate, they would “be like God!” But like all of the devil’s promises, it was empty. Adam and Eve had become the *opposite* of God – sinful. And so for the first time, they’re experiencing those horrible emotions you and I know go along with sin: Shame. Guilt.

And fear. Suddenly, they hear God walking through the Garden. And in their pre-fall perfection, that sound would have made their hearts leap for joy their feet run towards their Creator! But not now. Now it leaves their hearts full of terror. And like cockroaches in your bathroom when you turn on the light, they scurry – behind this tree, then that one – trying to hide themselves from God. Avoid being confronted with what they’ve done; escape what they know they deserve.

It’s been said – and it’s true – that this is the first of countless attempts by human beings to save ourselves from our sin. And like all the rest, it’s futile, and it shows how foolish sin makes us: Can you have feet fast enough to run from a God who’s everywhere? Find a tree thick enough to hide from the God who knows everything?

And yet we still try. This is how we still respond to guilt, isn’t it? Running and hiding from God. The Christian who is living in a way that doesn’t please God tends to stay away from church to avoid hearing what God has to say about his life. The member who hasn’t been to church in ages – the last person he wants to see on his doorstep is pastor. He doesn’t want to be confronted on his sin.

It’s why when we’ve sinned and the guilt comes, we tend to avoid God’s Word and prayer and maybe even thinking about God. We know how he feels about what we’ve done, and we’re afraid to face him because of it. It’s why we’d all be more comfortable if pastor on Sunday pointed out other people’s sins, and avoided shining the spotlight on mine.

“**Where are you?**” God says to each of us this morning. Are you hiding because you don’t want God to confront you on some sin in your life? Are you hiding from his call to repentance?

“**Where are you?**” God called to Adam. And I wasn’t there, but I don’t think God yelled it in anger. This wasn’t a search and destroy mission, after all – although that was what we deserved. No, it was a search and rescue mission. God doesn’t ask the question for his own benefit– he knew very well where Adam was hiding. He also knew *why* Adam was hiding. No, he wanted Adam to think about why he was hiding. Recognize his sin, confess it.

But Adam’s not so willing to let his sin be uncovered. If he can’t hide from God, he’ll at least try to hide his sin behind an excuse. Did you notice how he answered God’s question? **I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid** – yes, Adam, you were. But why? Because you sinned? No, “**because I was naked**, and I couldn’t present myself before you like that now, could I? That’s why I hid.”

Where are you? God says to us to uncover our sin. And how often don’t we find ourselves hiding behind excuses, like Adam? “I was in a bad mood.” “It just slipped out, I didn’t mean to say it.” “Come on, nobody’s perfect.” Even our confessions come with “buts,” as if what we did is for some reason excusable.

But Adam inadvertently said too much. **Who told you you were naked?** God said to him. **Did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat from?** It would seem that finally the sin is uncovered. No more hiding, right? But Adam’s not done. Now he hides behind his wife. If he can’t hide the sin, hang the blame on someone else: “**The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree.**” And Eve: “**The serpent deceived me!**” Adam blames Eve and God. Eve blames the serpent.

Yet don’t we do the same when our sins are uncovered? Hang the blame on others. Struggles in a marriage are more my spouse’s fault than mine. If I lose my temper, it’s not my fault I lack self-control – it’s theirs for doing or saying something stupid. It’s my parents’ fault for not raising me right, or my boss’s fault for being such a jerk. “He started it!” “She did it to me first!” **Where are you?** God says. And how often doesn’t he find us blaming others for our sins?

Where are you? Do you see God’s love behind the question? God’s love for Adam and Eve and for you? The worst thing God could do to us is to give us what we wanted. To leave us alone as we run and

hide from him. To leave us alone as we try to cover our sins with excuses or finger-pointing. To leave us alone with our sins until the Last Day when we're standing alone with our sins before his judgment seat, only to find out there that you can't hide from God, and that none of our excuses or self-justifications hold any water in his courtroom.

But he didn't! He doesn't! He seeks us out in his Word. **Where are you?** he says as he starts that conversation we desperately want to avoid, but the one we desperately need. The one where he patiently and persistently uncovers our sin. Peels back our excuses and evasions and throws them away until we're left with nothing left to say but, "I have sinned."

II. So that he can cover our sin

Did you notice – that's where he led Adam and Eve? For all their hiding, what were their very last words? **"I ate."** I ate. Sin uncovered. Sin confessed. And now God can do for them what he was after all along: Cover their sin for them.

He says it to the devil, but he says it so that Adam and Eve can hear it: **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.**" By sinning, Adam and Eve leapt into the devil's arms. Sin had made them God's enemies – proof is their running and hiding and blaming God for what happened! Here, God says, "I'm taking Adam and Eve back into my arms. I'm putting the enmity back where it belongs."

But to do that, he needs to take away the sin that caused it in the first place. And that, too, God promised he'd do for Adam and Eve. **He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.** You get the picture, right? A snake whose head is crushed is done for. But it's a victory that comes at a price – a heel strike. God promises a male descendant of Adam and Eve who would beat the devil by taking away the sin he brought into the world. But it was a victory he'd win at a price, by suffering.

You know this man. He's God in the flesh, Jesus. The one who loved you enough to pay the price for your sins – to suffer the punishment you deserved for them in your place. The one who by doing so took away the sins that stood between you and God. Since you could never hide your sins from God, Jesus shed his blood on the cross and covered over your sins so that God no longer sees them.

Where are you? God says. It's a question that uncovers our sins, all so that God can point us to Christ and say, "I've covered your sins," and welcome us into his arms. And since this is the kind of God we have, he's not a God to run from – he's a God to run to. Doesn't drive us away in fear, but draws us to himself with cords of love. There's no need to hide, because he hides us in Christ. There's no need to try to cover our sins, because he covers them for us. No need to try to justify them, because for Jesus' sake, God justifies us.

Where are you? God won't stop seeking you out in his word. Don't run from him – run to him there. Let him do his work in your heart. Let him uncover your sins. Confess them openly and honestly, no excuses, no justifications. You never need to fear the response; in Jesus, it is always, "Forgiven." In Christ, there is no more reason to hide. Amen.