

Hide and Seek

In the name of him who for us crushed the serpent's head, dear friends in Christ: The game Hide and Seek is quite simple. For most of the participants the object is to find a place to hide so that you won't be discovered by the person who is "it". That person's object is to find the other players who are hiding. I'm sure you are all familiar with the game. Indeed, it's a safe bet that at one time or another, we've all played it. And it's small wonder, for we see in today's reading from Genesis that it's the first and oldest game in human history.

We have our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the immediate aftermath of the fall into sin. The Lord had made all things for them, and placed them in charge of the entire creation. He had given them a perfect home in an earthly paradise. And he had also given them the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – not as a test of their obedience as is often claimed, but rather as a means for them to express their love for him – which they needed to do because they were made in the image of God, and God is love. And love is about giving sacrificially for the good of others. The problem is that there was nothing Adam and Eve could give for the good of God. He has no needs. So the Lord gave them the very thing they were to sacrifice: the fruit of that tree. By not eating it, by denying themselves of it, they expressed their love for God.

The problem began when they permitted themselves to listen to a voice other than the Lord's; a voice that promised them something more: a knowledge like that of the Lord himself. They could be like God. And they believed it. They fell for the lie that the Lord's ways were not the best for them, that he was holding something back from them. They ate from the forbidden tree. And in so doing they were saying something. They were saying we don't trust the Lord. We don't love him. We place ourselves above him. My interests, my good, everything about me comes first.

That is the very essence of evil – which they had now become. Immediately they were ashamed of themselves; the nakedness of their bodies, yes; but even more the guilt and shame they felt inside: their selfish thoughts, the evil desires of their hearts – the fear of these things being revealed.

See them congratulating themselves on their clever solution to the problem. Got some shame? Hide it. Sew together fig leaves with a bit of stringy vine. There. Very fashionable. Light weight. Flexible (until the leaves dry out). Not very durable, true; but easily replaced. Yes. They imagine that they did pretty well at hiding their little mistake.

That is until they hear the sound of the Lord walking in the garden. That they recognize the sound tells us that they are familiar with it; they've heard it before, likely every day about this same time. Up until now it was the highlight of the day: their early evening walk in the garden with the Lord. They'd go running to greet him. But not today. The sound that once filled them with joy now fills them with terror. Suddenly the fig leaf suits look pretty silly. This won't fool *him* even for a second. Only one thing left to do: run. Hide. And so the first game of hide and seek began.

In this game it is always the Lord who is "it". Sinful people never go looking for him. It's always the other way around. The Lord in mercy comes to seek those who are lost and trying to hide from him. And take note how he does it: he doesn't sneak up behind them and say

“Gotcha!” No, he calls. He uses words. He calls with his voice – the same voice he used to create all things when he spoke them into existence. Now he uses it to call to the man, “Where are you?”

It’s not that he doesn’t know. No one can really hide from the Lord, no more than they can hide their shame with fig leaves. The trouble is we don’t know it. Sin is a form of self deception. We *think* we can hide – until we are confronted with the truth.

Adam’s response is classic. “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” Note what he doesn’t say: I sinned. I’m sorry. He describes the symptoms, but not the root of the problem. He’s still trying to hide.

It takes the Lord to find him out: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

Yes, but it’s not my fault. “The *woman* whom *you* gave to be with me, *she* gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate.” I’m the victim here, can’t you see? It’s her fault. And it’s yours for giving her to me in the first place. I’m innocent!

Still trying to hide. Still trying to deny the truth. And in the process, revealing how far he’s fallen. Before, he loved Eve perfectly. Her put her needs above his own. We could imagine a scenario in which she ate the forbidden fruit but he didn’t. Then what would he have said? Why, he would have taken the blame upon himself. He would have insisted upon receiving the punishment she deserved. How do I know? Because that’s what Christ does for his bride, the Church. And Adam was Christ-like before the fall. Not anymore. Now it’s save myself and she can be damned – even if it means hiding the truth with a bunch of self-serving lies. The trouble is that with each one he tells, he only digs himself deeper into the hole. He only shows how sinful he’s become and makes himself more guilty.

The Lord having thoroughly exposed Adam, now turns his attention to Eve. “What is this that you have done?” She’s not about to accept any blame either. It was that rotten serpent. “[He] deceived me, and I ate.” Forget the fact that I believed that you were holding out on us, that you didn’t have our best interests at heart. Forget that I reveled in the thought of becoming a goddess in my own right and of being equal or maybe even superior to you. These things are not important. The main thing here is that I was tricked. It’s not my fault. Yes, Eve proves herself to be every bit as good at this hiding game as her husband. That is to say, she tries real hard; but in the end, her best attempts fail. She too stands exposed before the Lord: naked and ashamed.

Then it’s the serpent’s turn. It’s worth noting that the Lord has no questions for him. He isn’t even allowed to speak in the presence of the Lord. He had his say earlier, and his honeyed words turned out to be pure poison. They always are. You’d think we’d learn not to listen to him.

The Lord adds a new word to his vocabulary when he addresses the serpent. Up until this point in the story, he’s blessed everything in his creation. He blessed the plants and animals. He blessed our first parents. He even blessed the seventh day and made it holy. But now he curses. “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.” It’s interesting: when introduced to the serpent, we were told he was the most crafty of all the beasts of the field. Now he’s the most cursed. And I think we want to take the part about eating

dust metaphorically. It's a picture of abject humiliation. That's what the devil and all who follow him earn for themselves: the wrath of God and an eternity of shame and disgrace.

And then we get to the good part: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." When they're trying to impress people with their limited knowledge of Latin, it's the passage theologians call the *proto-evangelicum*, which simply means "first gospel". (Are you impressed?) Though it is a bit cryptic at this point, it's the first reference to God's plan of salvation in Christ Jesus his Son. And to best unpack it, it will be helpful to know that the word translated "offspring", is more accurately rendered "seed". There will be enmity – that is, conflict, antagonism, opposition – between the seed of the serpent, those who are of their father, the devil, and believe his lies; and the seed of the woman. And we want to understand that in general as believers, those who adhere to God's word, the members of Christ's Church.

In a more specific sense, however, we note that the word "seed" is singular. There is a certain "seed of the woman" who will come. He – singular – will strike your head. That is, you will be crushed and defeated by him; your reign and headship will end. And you will strike his heel, which means that he will feel the excruciating burn of your venom. And so he did, when he suffered and died on the cross for our sins.

It's worth noting here also that there is an oxymoron in the phrase "seed of the woman". Strictly speaking, if you're thinking like the ancients did, women don't have seed. That's a male thing. What "the seed of the woman" hints at is Jesus' divine parentage and his virgin birth.

That virgin birth, as you know, came to pass in the fullness of time, when the long-awaited Christ came into this world to fulfill all that had been promised. And fulfill it he did. He lived the perfect sinless life on our behalf; and he gave that life as the sin offering, taking upon himself the fullness of his Father's wrath and the bitter consequences of the curse. In so doing, he defeated Satan's reign and ended his power over us. And in his resurrection he announced his victory.

All that is done, but the game of Hide and Seek goes on. The Lord continues to seek those who are lost and hiding, whose natural inclination is to flee from him at the sound of his approach. In John's Gospel, Jesus said it this way: The Light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the Light and does not come into the Light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true, comes into the Light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God." That is to say, if you are found, if the truth is exposed, that's the Lord's doing.

By God's grace we have been found and exposed. For most of us, it happened first in our Baptism. It's a good thing too, because at the time, most of us were too young to be very good at running and hiding. But the Lord's technique was the same. He first exposed our sinful condition, and then he called us by the Gospel, with water and Word baptizing us into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. He raised us with him in the new life in which we stand righteous before God – as righteous as were our first parents before the fall.

And that makes us targets for Satan's lies, just like they were. Though defeated, he's not done causing mischief. He still seeks to take us down with him. Now, as believers, we have the power to say no to him; but sadly, sometimes he's successful, luring true believers away with his honeyed lies and promises of something better than the Lord has to offer. And when

that happens, the inclination is to flee, to run beyond the sound of the Lord's voice calling sinners to repentance.

But even for us who are here, who have been called and found, the inclination is to hide things. The sinful nature is still in there claiming innocence or victimhood, making excuses, shifting the blame, pulling all the dodges Adam and Eve tried – not willing to come fully into the truth and Light.

It's a dangerous game. In this game of Hide and Seek, the hider who wins, loses. Big time. Better to admit defeat. Better to come into the Light as often as the Lord calls. Better to be exposed and forgiven for Christ's sake, for the hider who loses like that, wins in the end. God grant it to us now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!