Adam, Where Are You?

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)
Adam, Where Are You?

Background Notes
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Key Scripture Texts: Genesis 3:1-9; Psalm 103:13; Ephesians 3:18; Isaiah 59:2; 52:7; Romans 10:15

Introduction
Transitions in leadership happen all the time: in government, in business, in sports, and, yes, even in churches. Our congregation has journeyed for several months, guided by the faithfulness of our senior staff, whose preaching and administering and counseling and pastoral care held us together and enabled us to reach out. It’s tempting to say they did this without missing a beat. For this we are all grateful.

This week we welcome into our pulpit Pastor Brian Wangler as our new senior pastor. And since this is the first set of Background Notes written in support of his ministry, I did a very ceremonial thing just now: I added his last name to my word processing dictionary so that it won’t be red-marked as misspelled! So, Pastor, you begin your ministry in these Notes without any red marks. ☺

The key scriptures chosen for his opening sermon will focus our attention in this week’s background discussion. What follows are some exegetical insights, triggered by these texts. As always, we concentrate on literary, historical, cultural, and linguistic matters that lie behind the passages and that point us in fruitful directions for personal study and reflection. Preachers approach the biblical material with a God-directed burden on their hearts, and so the sermon for this week is a fitting introduction to both the preacher and his message. We invite the Holy Spirit to anoint Pastor Wangler’s efforts.

A provocative question cries out from the center of Genesis 3. It is God’s question, and it grows out of a deeply human tragedy with profound consequences for human history. “Adam, where are you (3:9)?” The context for God’s question is the fatal human decision to accept the counsel of the serpent, rather than the Word of God. Adam, the creature made from the earth1 and endowed with God’s image, is both male and female in his crisis. Thus, when God speaks the question into the chaos of the fall, He addresses both partners in crime. Both are responsible, and both are, to coin a phrase, in a very bad place. God is not asking about their spatial location, as if He does not know where they are in the space-time world He has created. He knows very well where they are. What the question asks human beings is if they know where they are. In effect He is asking, “Do you any idea where you have put yourselves? Do you know what a tight spot you are in? Do you realize the social, moral, and spiritual place you now inhabit as a consequence of your choices?”

“Where” is, then, the crucial word in the question, and it has to do less with location and more with condition. Recently, I had a conversation with a good friend who was facing a tough health decision. He said to me, “Bob, I’m in a very strange place these days.” On other occasions, people tell us they are “in a very different place” than when we last met. Faced with the chaos of the world around us, it’s not uncommon to hear people ask, “So, where are you these days?” Using the language of place (“where”) to talk about state of mind or personal perspective or physical health is a common practice. Sliding into moments of anxiety, we feel as if we have

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1 The Hebrew word āḏām literally means “earth creature” — a sober reminder that human beings belong to the same stuff as the world in which they live. If descent from monkeys disturbs us, this text tells us that our origin is even more humble: from dirt.
slipped into an alternative reality, and that we “aren’t in Kansas anymore”! Old familiar feelings and relationships suddenly give way to dreadfully foreign circumstances where we have no firm footing.

Did Adam-as-male-and-female have any idea the gravity of their dislocation? God loses no time in bringing a strong dose of reality to their situation. He does this with the simple, though profound, question: “Where are you?”

The Context for the Question: Adam Where Were You?

Creation: Rich and Full
Like many questions in the Bible, this one comes from the mouth of God the creator who has just celebrated the crowning glory of His work in Genesis 2:1-3. Three great verbs of grand achievement flow from the closing verses of the first creation account (1:1-2:3): “finished,” “rested,” and “blessed.” They are reinforced by 1:31 where we read, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” A series of intermediate pronouncements in chapter 1 tell us that God saw His work as “good,” but in this case, the whole work of creation, now completed (2:1), is very good. The underlying Hebrew of the text says, “Here’s the situation: Good with muchness.” God made His world with abundance and with force. Hebrew has no adverbs, so the biblical writers use alternate forms to express the same idea. We would probably say, “Good exceedingly,” in order to capture the idea behind the Hebrew word me’ōd. Creation is rich and full, in another words, and so God takes His heavenly throne and rests, not because He is tired, but because His work is done and He is wholly satisfied with it. Thus, the Sabbath has among its meanings, “to cease from work, one day in seven, knowing that, even without working, one’s life is filled with the abundance of creation, and that, on this seventh day, human beings can share God’s exuberance over what has been accomplished in six days without working the seventh.” Such is the mood as the first creation account ends.

Relation: Divine and Human
Creation is a complex relation, a rich environment filled with living things that are fruitful and that multiply. There’s nothing beggarly about God’s world. The world is full and generous in its gifts to human beings. In the second creation account (Genesis 2:4-25), the biblical writer unpacks the details of the interrelatedness of God’s creation. He is telling us what the world ought to look like and how human beings ought to exist in that world, living under promise and in obedience. So much promise fills the world God made, and Adam-as-male-and-female share the promise. Several key points define the divine-human relation.

1. Provision. The second story of creation describes a world made for human beings. Scholars who interact with both science and theology suggest the anthropic principle, that everything about the earliest origins of the universe point to the sustenance of human beings in it. The world has been made for sustaining human beings, and human beings have been made for understanding the world. Nothing in this statement takes sides on the how of creation (e.g. evolution vs. 6-day creation), only that the birth of the universe assumes the eventual appearance of human beings. Genesis 2 presents a similar perspective in a very different way. According to 2:4-15, human beings were uppermost in God’s mind when he crafted earth’s ecosystem. Using agricultural language, the text describes the formation of a life-system, the creation of humankind from the same earth out of which all things in that life-system grow, and the placement of the humans in this “garden.”

The text pays considerable attention to the flow of rivers and to the identification of natural resources that would later enrich human life. In all of this, God is saying to His human creation, “I have done of all this for your sake and for your benefit.” Even the vegetation that “grows out of the ground” is made for its aesthetic qualities — “pleasing to the eye” — and for its life-sustaining force — “good for food” (2:9). Further, the placement of two special trees draws attention to the human’s sustained existence (“Tree of Life”) and moral development (“Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”). As to this latter point, we read that the humans where supposed to “work the Garden of Eden and care for it” (2:15). So we can say that
God was green before green was trendy!  *Garden* is the symbol for the domain of human activity, as well as the sign of God’s provision. In the garden, Adam will experience flourishing humanity, provisioned by God. What opportunity awaits the human creation!

2. **Creativity.** “You are free…” Those remarkable words introduce the section beginning at 2:16. Freedom lies at the center of human flourishing, made that way by God so that Adam might express the “image of God” that lies at the center of the human *being* (see 1:26). The first creation account emphasizes this *image* as the essential expression of God’s own being in Adam-as-male-and-female in all their relatedness and in all their glory. The second account speaks of God’s breath as the basis for life (2:7). Image and breath come from God so that human beings might practice creativity in the garden, bringing glory to God the creator whose own glory fills the world. In freedom, the human being is both maker and discoverer of God’s world. Creation is about both what God already made and about what He wants Adam to make. For in Adam’s work, God’s work continues, thereby making Adam’s place in the world essential and expressive.

3. **Discovery.** When the writer of Genesis 2:4-25 portrays the story of God and Adam, he reveals a world in the making, filled with discoveries. Oddly, the creation of animals in the second account seems to follow, rather than to precede, the creation of the human — the reverse of Genesis 1:1-2:3. This is no contradiction, but it is evidence that the accounts of creation can scarcely be read literally, without interpretation. The ancient writers were not products of enlightenment thought, but experienced the world as diverse, pluriform, and filled with contrasts. After all, where can we find adequate language to write about events that literally happen at the edge of ordinary history? For such events, the ancients preferred poetic language and the medium of story-telling. The biblical writers call us “to imagine” what the world was like for the earliest humans, using colorful, playful, yet profound narratives to do so.

In the case of Genesis 2, God grants freedom for Adam to discover that in all the animate order of things, “no suitable helper was found” (2:20). If Adam-as-male *names* something, he thereby gains power over it, controls it, understands it, and in every way conquers it. Yet in all of his discovery of such power, he finds nothing that could possible be his *peer*. That seems to be the sense of the term “suitable helper.” In the named animals, Adam-as-male finds no being that *corresponds to him*, and that he can look straight in the eye with full awareness of mutual understanding and genuine love. To be human involves having such an encounter. He discovers that control of others does not lead to relationship with them.

Finding a true peer will rescue Adam-as-male from the aloneness, the solitude that God immediately observed when the human at first rises from dust as the breathing image of God (2:18). Solitary existence, Adam discovers, is not true human existence. Once again, God comes to the aid of His supreme creation.

4. **Relationship.** The identity of humans as male and female comes from God’s own hand, described as a kind of surgery whereby woman comes out of man (Hebrew: *’ish* from *’ishah*), and this unique act of endowing humans with this identity has a certain mystery about it, having been conceived while the original human is asleep.

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2 The Hebrew phrase is *’ezër k’neged* “helper like one facing.” In other words, companionship requires the face-to-face sort of relation that will rescue the human from his being alone.
In a sense, the act of sleeping and awakening provides an imaginative way of speaking about how men and women experience their own identities in relationship to each other. Sleep, in this context, functions much like the unconscious self, coming to new awareness of who I am and who the other is. Stages of marriage are moments of awakening and discovery, as the human Adam exclaims in 2:23:

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman” (Heb. ‘îshah) for she was taken out of man (Heb. ‘îsh).

When the Hebrew language attaches the suffix –ah to certain words, the meaning is “toward” or “in connection with.” The ancient texts of Genesis depict human men and women as naturally formed to be toward each other, and the degree to which they are able to live out the richness of that relationship rests with their awareness of each other as formed this way by God.

Seizing the power of this image, the writer in 2:24 tells us that since men and women belong together, they must begin their married life with the decision to be together, while making clean breaks with their birth families. The writer in this case knows that the ordinary way human beings come into the world is by women giving birth to them, and under that rubric, men come out of women, not the other way around. However, the natural order of birth conceals the deeper order of creation, where woman comes out of man. The reason for this reversal may involve both the patriarchal structure of ancient society and the desire to see origins equally in both male and female terms. There exist in the Genesis text the same tensions as we might experience today as we sort out the relationship of man and woman in marriage. No doubt, a later unknown writer who reflected on this passage had the same inner conflict when he suggested that “God did not make woman from man’s foot to be under him or from his head to be over him but from his rib, near his heart, to be beside him.”

5. **Obedience.** Awareness of human responsibility appears throughout Genesis 1-2. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and rule over it” are God’s instructions in 1:28. They are calls to obey, and they are supported by the promise, “I give you every … (1:29).” From the beginning, obedience is tied to promise in the biblical story of the human race. Further, in 2:16-17, the promise of sustenance (“free to eat from any tree”) is coupled with an act of obedience (“you must not eat”) and a consequence (“you shall surely die”). Here then is the ethical imperative of human life at creation. Human beings validate their freedom through responsible obedience, lived under the promise and fully aware of the consequences.

6. **Promise.** To be made “in the image of God” shapes the promise of human life, for it tells us that God desires His earthly creations to resemble Himself. “Let us make the human in our image and after our likeness…” (1:26). Theologians have, for centuries, discussed the meanings of the “image” (Hebrew: tzelem) and the “likeness” (Hebrew: d’muth). Both terms have the pronoun “our,” leaving some to speculate that the Trinity is in view. Others think that God addresses His heavenly council of angels. Still others that the plural is the majesty of God in all its many forms (power, intelligence, etc.) which He shares with his human creations. Rabbi Kushner has proposed that “our” may be addressed by God to all other created things made before the human creation, thus enlisting the chemistry of creation for God’s crowning achievement: the human being.

No matter how we construe the use of “our,” it is clear that a relation is involved. Human relatedness as “male and female” shares in the relatedness of God with the world and of God as He is in Himself. The promise of creation in God’s image is the promise of relationship.

7. **Sustenance.** Closely allied with promise is the provision of God for all human needs. Genesis makes eminently clear that God generously prepared the world for human beings: “… every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth” belongs to humankind for food (Genesis 1:29). God offered to them “everything richly to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

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3 That saying has many variations, not all of them complimentary!
God’s creation of humankind involves a rich provision for an abundant life. Genesis 1-2 tells us where Adam was before the catastrophic choice of Genesis 3. Adam was in the place of God’s choosing, surrounded by God’s blessing, and guided by God’s leading. The human bearers of God’s image had the optimum environment for flourishing and for realizing the potential of their natures. Above all, they were free agents, sharing in the privilege of making decisions among the varied options given to them by God.

**Adam Where Are You Now?**

It’s evident from reading Genesis 3:1-9 that wherever he is now, Adam is far away from where he began. Theologians speak of the Fall when explaining this text. Adam fell from a place that was close to God’s purposes and in harmony with God’s world and in relationship with his companion. Wherever Adam is in Genesis 3, it’s not the place God intended him to be.

Let’s listen to the key text:

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?" BUT THE LORD GOD SAID TO THE WIFE, "YOU MUST NOT TOUCH IT, OR YOU WILL DIE." WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THAT THE FRUIT OF THE TREE WAS GOOD FOR FOOD AND PLEASING TO THE EYE, AND ALSO DESIRABLE FOR GAINING WISDOM, SHE TOOK SOME AND ATE IT. THEN THE EYES OF BOTH OF THEM WERE OPENED, AND THEY REALIZED THEY WERE NAKED; SO THEY SEWED FIG LEAVES TOGETHER AND MADE COVERINGS FOR THEMSELVES. 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. BUT THE LORD GOD CALLED TO THE MAN, “WHERE ARE YOU?” (Genesis 3:1-9).*

1. The cause of the fall was not an over-bearing supernatural visitation from an alien power. At least not according to the text in front of us. It is true that later readings of Genesis 3 will supply some additional background detail identifying the serpent in the story with a being known as Satan or the Devil. Revelation makes this connection at the end of the New Testament (12:9; 20:2). So does Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:3. But for the first readers of this text, all they have to go on are the words, “the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals…” As far as the humans in this story are concerned, they are dealing with a creature (wild animal), inferior to themselves, that they encountered in the garden God provisioned for them. God had commanded Adam to give names to all such creatures in Genesis 2:19-20, and by doing so, Adam assumed dominion over them as God had planned (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, Adam had met the serpent before, and he had named it! Therefore, after the fall, the humans would have no reason for blaming their failure on the fact that some superior creature overwhelmingly bent their choice to its will, and that they could not help themselves in what they wrongfully did. The man and the woman made their decision with their eyes open to the reality before them. Put simply, they had no business talking to the serpent or listening to the serpent or taking advice from the serpent or paying heed to the serpent, since the serpent belonged to an order of being below them and dependent on them. They had no business talking to a snake!

2. As part of their obedience to God, according to Genesis 2:15, human beings were supposed to take care of the garden where God placed Adam. The Hebrew word translated “take care of” is šōmār, which has the root meaning, “guard.” That is, should anything or anyone threaten the sanctity of the garden, the humans had authorization to turn back or throw out the offender. The talking serpent turned out to be such an intruder, precisely because it challenged the truthfulness of God’s Word to the humans and offered to them an alternative word instead — one that should have been far above its pay grade! By casting doubt on the reliability of God and on His intentions toward His human creation, the serpent showed itself to be a rebel bent on undermining the purposes of God for creation.

3. Given the opportunity to clarify what God actually said about the fruit trees, the woman begins to improvise with her answers. She speaks as if there is only *one tree* in the middle of the garden, when in fact there are *two trees*: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Considering the blessing inherent in the Tree of Life, its omission from her response gives the serpent opportunity to exploit what it argues is a flaw in God’s character. Further, the woman adds the words “and you must not touch it” to what
God actually said about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God never said that, and by adding the additional words, the woman may well be revealing a growing sense of distrust, spurred on by the serpent’s line of questioning.

4. The temptation by the serpent also includes a huge act of imagination concerning what God knows. How does the serpent know what God knows? Is there anything that the two humans needed to know that God withheld from them? The attribution of duplicity to God and the implication that God is holding out on His human creations lies at the center of the crafty serpent’s strategy in deceiving the human pair.

5. God endowed Adam-as-male-and-female with the ability to gain information from the physical world, process it, assign value to it, and make judgments about it. The five senses are the divinely created instruments for doing this, coupled with the human mind and its analytic, synthetic, and linguistic capacities. To help the humans perform these tasks, God gave reasonable rules that limited the use of certain parts of the created world, and thus formed an ethical sense in the man and the woman. At the same time, God encouraged them to make full use of everything else — the evidence of His gracious generosity to them. However, according to 3:8, the woman and “her husband with her” (3:6), proceeded to use their God-given abilities selectively, choosing to assign value only to what “was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom.” Thus, they both “took” the fruit with each other’s full knowledge, and they both “ate” it. We sometimes refer to their actions with these designations: “lust of the flesh,” “lust of the eyes,” and “the pride of life.” Each of these phrases corresponds to the three judgments listed in 3:6. They also appear together in 1 John 2:15-17, and they are collectively tied to “the world and its desires that are passing away.”

6. The serpent deceived the human pair with a classic “bait and switch.” It promised that their eyes would be “opened” by eating the forbidden fruit, and thereby they would become like God, having the power to judge for themselves what is good and what is evil. What they discovered was something quite different. Yes, their eyes were opened, but not with joyful wonder at a newfound power to know. Instead, they saw themselves as naked, requiring them to improvise a covering that in effect sent them into hiding from each other and from God. What had been a glory to them became a source of immediate shame. Originally made in God’s image, they now shrank in fear of what they were and of what they had now become.

7. The image of the man and the woman hiding “among the trees of the garden” is filled with dramatic irony. At the root of their fall was a mishandling of “the tree,” and so “the trees” become the very places where they seek refuge. But why did they ultimately hide? It was because they “heard the sound of Yahweh God.” The Hebrew text says they heard the kôl of Yahweh God — that is, the “voice” drove them into hiding. Further, the phrase “in the cool of the day” means a bit more than this romanticized translation suggests. In Hebrew, we read, Frúah hayôm, “as the Spirit of the Day.” The word ruáh is the Hebrew word for “wind, Spirit, or breath,” and reminds us of Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit sweeps back and forth over the deep, brooding over the chaos, and anticipating the first creative words of God. Ruáh is God’s breath directed into the human whom God formed from the dust of the ground and declared to be a “living being” (2:7) because of this breath. For Yahweh God to walk in the garden as the Spirit of the Day means that God comes with fresh breath and new life. But it also means that God comes in judgment, for the Spirit is the Spirit of the Day — the “Day of the Lord” when all things gone wrong need to be sorted out and made right again. Judgment is both negative and positive in significance, and what God declares to be sin He determines to forgive through His atonement and human repentance.

**Where We Are and Where We Can Be**

And so, when the defining question of this passage finally comes in 3:9, we are challenged to ask ourselves, “Where are you?” or “Where are we?”

1. Where are we in relationship to our originally intended creation as image-bearers of God?
2. Where are we with reference to the good world God made in all its richness and fullness and fruitfulness? How well have we taken care of that world, guarding it from all that would destroy it?
3. Where are we when it comes to our creaturely powers to see and to know and to understand the world around us? Are we captives to our five senses, and devoid of God-given judgment, or are we leaning not on
our own understanding, but in all our ways are acknowledging God so that He might direct our paths (see Proverbs 3:5-6)?

4. Where are we in our ability to say no to false claims about God and His world? If worldly wisdom tells us that God’s Word is too limiting or too restrictive of our humanity, how do we respond?

5. Where are we in trusting God’s intentions toward us? Do we believe that He has our best interests as heart, or are we constantly questioning His judgment?

6. Where are we in making choices that have significant consequences? Do we give the Word of God opportunity to guide those choices so that the outcomes result in our blessing and not in our falling?

7. Where are we in relationship to the significant people in our lives? How have our actions affected our spouse, our children, our neighbors, or the family of God? Do we allow God to shape all of those interactions with the power of His love?

8. Where are we when we sin and turn away from God? Do we try to patch things up with our own resources, or do we recognize the need for God’s grace to forgive and to cleanse and to re-direct?

9. Where are we when faced with shame? Do we go into hiding and then remain there, repressing the distastefulness of it all and living in denial rather than facing it honestly in transparency and repentance?

10. Where are we when God comes to us in the midst of our lostness, and when He asks us “Where are you?” Are we open to the convicting power of His Holy Spirit, or do we pretend that things are fine and don’t need correcting?

Where are we? God knows where we are, but do we? We know where God wants us to be by studying how He made us in the beginning. We also know that God understands our weakness and shows mercy to His lost human creation. Consider the words of the psalmist in Psalm 103:13-18:

13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children— 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The key phrase here is “he remembers that we are dust.” Dust is where we came from, although it is not all that we are. Whenever the Bible uses the word “remember” as an activity of God, the emphasis falls on God’s covenant remembrance, which means that God remains faithful to the promises He has made with His human creation and with His people. It doesn’t mean that God forgot and then recalled! It does mean that God is mindful of us in our creatureliness and human frailty, and determines to do whatever is required to help us in our fallen condition.

Knowing that we are dust and that we are like grass ...like a flower of the field, highly vulnerable to the withering heat of the wind — knowing these things, God commits Himself to respond “from everlasting to everlasting” with steadfast love and with righteousness. The psalmist explicitly says that the place where the grass and the flower grow does not remember, but Yahweh remembers! Examine the ruins of fallen civilizations and ask, “How much has been lost here?” If it has been lost, it has also been forgotten. How much of human history lies ruined beneath the dust of death? Still, Yahweh remembers and keeps His covenant.

Recovery from the fall is not automatic, however. God takes the first step. He takes the initiative and comes looking for the man and the woman. He calls out, “Where are you?” not because God lost Adam, but because Adam lost God. Human beings are never beyond the reach of God’s finding them. To discover the long reach of God’s love, we turn to the New Testament, where God places before our imagination a powerful picture of God’s love for human beings.

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 18 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16-19).
Love, according to Paul’s rendering, is what gives us roots and a foundation, both of which have been lost in our shared humanity. The discovery of this love lies in our inner being, and becomes not simply a good feeling or sentimental emotion, but rather arises from God’s “power through his Spirit.” Love as power, in the Greek text, is *agapē as dunamis*. That is, love is God’s self-giving to us that takes the form of a productive power in our lives. Weakness and frailty, products of the human condition, are displaced by the strengthened power of love, brought into our lives by the Holy Spirit.

To further explain this process, Paul uses the language of *residence*, praying that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Elsewhere, he tells us that “Christ in you” is “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), which means that the indwelling Christ re-orient our lives toward the future where real newness is possible. That’s the meaning of *hope*, and God’s love calls us out of hiding, and clothes us with righteousness instead of with shabby leaves (Psalm 132:9; Isaiah 61:10; Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14).

In the universe of God’s kingdom, there is no place to hide and there is no need to hide. For His kingdom, rooted and established in love, has enough width and length and height and depth to exceed the human measurement. Indeed, the emptiness of the fall gives way to “all the fullness of God,” which is the true destiny of human beings as the bearers of God’s image. No place to hide where the fullness of God defines the boundaries of His world. No place to hide where we share the experience of God’s love together “with all the saints” — all true followers of Jesus Christ — through the body of Christ, the church.

This is, Paul reminds his audience, an experience that “surpasses knowledge.” For the human pair in Genesis 3, knowledge had become the primary goal, for they believed the serpent’s lie that the sort of knowledge they would obtain was like God’s own knowledge. Yet, the relationship God wanted with His human creation did not consist in *knowledge by acquisition* at all, but consisted in trusting love where creatures take God at His Word and believe that He has their best interests at heart. Paul concurs. God’s love fills us up and goes beyond the kind of knowing found through the five senses alone. Such knowledge is acquisitive, exploitive, possessive, and controlling. Such knowledge seeks to dominate the world and to displace God from it. But the love of God breaks all such human contrivances and sets us free to live with Him and He with us in a world where there is no place to hide, because there does not need to be a place to hide.

Speaking to Israel in the aftermath of the exile in Babylon, the prophet declared:

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:1-2).

While we cannot hide from God, the book of Isaiah tells us that God may very well turn his face from us and refuse to hear. Why? How? The answer is in the words “your iniquities” and “your sins.” Our sin is anything that intrudes between ourselves and God — things entirely within our realm of responsibility. God is able to save, and God is able to hear. Yet a holy and righteous God will not look on sin and permit sin to continue in human life. Reading further in Isaiah 59, we meet with a list of human failures, climaxing with 59:16a that says “He saw that there was no one to intervene.” The solution to the human problem of lostness cannot be found within the human capacity to turn things around. Therefore, God needed to act and take the first step:

... so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak (Isaiah 59:16b-17).

As followers of Jesus, we know “his own arm [that] worked salvation for him.” God’s arm in history is the person of Jesus Christ who is God’s “own righteousness” — that is, the one who came to set things right, and put human beings where they belong. And God calls us to tell the world that this is so.

Such an intention was not an afterthought with God, but belonged to His purpose from the beginning. The book of *Isaiah* once more fills in the remarkable truth that as far back at the 6th century B.C.E. God was getting the Good News out into the streets of ancient Israel by declaring it from the mountain tops. Consider these key texts that all announce the same message:
Isaiah 40:9  9 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!”

Isaiah 41:27  27 I was the first to tell Zion, ‘Look, here they are!’ I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings.

Isaiah 52:7  7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Isaiah 61:1-4  The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,  2 to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,  3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.  4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

Notice the repeated language: “good news” and “good tidings.” These words are equivalent to our New Testament idea of “Gospel” — Good News (see Romans 10:15). They are God’s determined response to fallen humanity’s serious condition. In Isaiah’s context, ancient Israel living in exile becomes the symbol of human beings who have lost their way with God, who don’t know where they are, and are in need of being found. Isaiah eloquently talks about “ashes” and “mourning” and “despair” and “ruins” and “devastation.” We might ask, “Israel where are you?” and Isaiah would promptly reply with these graphic descriptions of exile and of loss. This is where you are, he is telling lost Israel.

Yet, the prophet does not leave Israel in despair or in the dust. In place of the displacement brought on by exile, God’s people are encouraged to hope for “beauty” and “gladness” and “praise.” Rather than “hiding among the trees” God’s people are called to become “oaks of righteousness” and “plantings” of Yahweh that once more reflect the glory of His image. Three strong verbs promise that Israel will “rebuild” and “restore” and “renew.” Once lost, they will at last be found. No longer will God ask “Where Are You?” Instead, they will rejoice that they are where God wants them to be, doing what God wants them to do, and living the abundant life that God designed them to experience.

**Conclusion**

This week’s texts draw our attention to human isolation and how it began. We learn of a loving Creator who built a world hospitable to human flourishing. We witness human beings exercising freedom to explore God’s world and discovering each other in loving community. Yet, human choice makes no guarantees, else it would not be free. God did not make robots. He made conscious rational living beings: designed to know and love Him; to explore and manage creation; and to discover and love each other. The price of freedom is the risk of loss, and human beings paid a high price for choosing themselves rather than God’s will.

As followers of Jesus, we take seriously the human story told by the Bible. We see that story lived out in the human family around us: where people engage in violence, and where neighbors do not love each other, and where marriages fail for lack of true love. We see that story in our own lives: through layers of denial in our souls; through grasping rather than trusting; through loving self more than neighbor or God; through self-destructive behaviors and addictions; through unconfessed sin and unresolved conflicts. We see the story of human beings wanting life on their own terms, and then ending up in painfully difficult places, and, in those places, scarcely knowing how to answer the question, Where are you?

The mission of the church is driven by this question as it applies to every human being within ear-shot of the congregation. Knowing where people are is basic to the task of Christian witness, both individually and as community. The question echoes in sanctuaries and in altar calls and in human hearts. The question shouts at us in the tragedies of human suffering: cruelty, disease, war, poverty, and persecution. Where are you?
As a congregation beginning a new journey with a new senior pastor, the question gives us reason to pause and ask why it is that we do all the things we are doing as a church. The question ought to animate our conversations with strangers and enflame our hearts for those in need. Among the countless unchurched in our immediate communities, the question mutters on the lips of rich and poor, famous and ordinary, and it knows no boundaries of creed, race, gender, age, or party loyalty.

To those who do not know where they are, or to those who do know but are in despair, the Gospel is the church’s great gift of new life and new beginnings and a new home. From the place of despair, the gospel brings us to the place of hope. From the place of conflict, the gospel brings us to the place of peace. From the place of sin, the gospel brings to the place of atonement, of forgiveness, and of reconciliation. From the place of broken promises, the gospel calls us to faith. From the place of broken relationships, the gospel offers us community in fellowship with Jesus Christ. From the place of lost identity, the gospel says, “We must be born again.”

So, where are you? Where are we?

“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Glory to God! Amen.
Digger Deeper: Adam, Where Are You?
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of Adam, Where Are You? carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website at http://www.chicagofirstnaz.org, click on Resources, click the tab Series, find and click on the series title, find and click on the date you want, and then click on the Background Notes link at the lower left. You can also pick up a copy of the Background Notes at the Information desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Take a few moments as before you begin working on these questions to pray for Pastor Brian Wanger and his wife, Lindy, as they begin their ministry among us this weekend.

2. The themes for this weekend come from Genesis 3:1-9 which ends with this probing question: “Adam, where are you (3:19)?” What do you think the word “where” means in this passage? Consider the statement: “I find myself in a very difficult place, right now.” What does the speaker mean by “place”? In what sense is place really a condition — the human condition?

3. Before diving into 3:1-9, take some time to read through Genesis 1-2, where we might imagine the question, “Adam, Where were you?” Before the events of Genesis 3, what was the human condition because of God’s Creation? Discuss Creation as the human habitat, specially designed by God so that human beings might flourish. Use the first two chapters of Genesis as your basis.

4. God did many things for human beings when He made them. Use the following words to organize your study of Genesis 1-2 as you answer this question: “Where were human beings before they gave in to sin?” 1) Provision; 2) Creativity; 3) Discovery; 4) Relationship; 5) Obedience; 6) Promise; 7) Sustenance.

5. Respond to this statement: God gave human beings the optimal environment to live the abundant life.

6. Carefully read Genesis 3:1-9. Be sure to read the material that appears after this text so that you have the whole context in view. Identify the defining moments in the story of what is called the human Fall.

7. What strategy did the serpent use to tempt human beings? What role does language play in that process? How might the original readers of this story have responded to it — the people who didn’t have all the backstory details that we have about Satan or the Devil? (See Revelation 12:9 and 20:2).

8. What mistakes did the humans make in their dialog with the serpent? How do we make the same mistakes?

9. Compare 1 John 2:15-17 to the three-fold temptation described in 3:6. How do the key elements match up? In each of the three critical moments, how do the humans move farther from the purpose of God?

10. By giving in to the temptation, how do the humans leave the place of Genesis 1-2 and go to a different place? Where is that place?


12. How should God’s provision for human beings in Genesis 1-2 have prepared them to face the challenge of Genesis 3? What critical mistakes did they make? How do we make the same mistakes?

13. In understanding God’s response to the fall, read Psalm 103:13-18. What key phrases show that God understands the human condition and wants to remedy it? How should that impact the way we view lost people today?

14. The fall results in the lost condition of human beings, and so God asks, “Where are you?” God knows where we are, but do we know? Discuss the significance of being “lost” in relationship to God, to creation, to others, and to ourselves. Now read Ephesians 3:16-19 and consider Paul’s image of space (18) as the new place where God’s love overflows in fullness.

15. God restores us to His rightful place through His Good News. Read the follow texts and discuss the new place God brings us: Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1-4. Who is supposed to bear this Good News?

16. Where are you? Where does God want you to be? How has He provided for your homecoming? Where are your neighbors, your family, your co-workers, and other lost people in your life? How are you helping them find their place with God once more?