

“God’s Questions: Where are You?”

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Text: Genesis 3:1-9

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Genesis 3:1-9

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

Our Jewish brothers and sisters are in the midst of their High Holy Days right now. They celebrated Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the new year last Sunday night through Tuesday night. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement begins this coming Tuesday night. One of the Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah is Genesis 3, known as “The Ayeka.” In English, that translates, “Where are you?” It is God’s first question in the Bible, one word in Hebrew. Ayeka? Where are you?

That question can mean many different things. At its most basic level, it’s a question of location. Where are you? I am in the pulpit at Myers Park Presbyterian Church. You are in the pews here in the sanctuary, or in Oxford Hall in Celebrate, and hundreds of you are someplace other than here watching via live stream. You are in the mountains, or you are in your car making your way back from wherever you’ve been this weekend. Where are you? It can be a question of location.

Understood this way, it’s as if God is in the midst of some sort of divine hide and seek game, and God is it, looking for Adam and Eve. Ayeka? Where are you? Given God’s all-knowing nature, I doubt that’s what *ayeka* means here. It might be more like an angry parent who has just discovered the mess in the living room ready to reign down judgment on the offending party. Where are you?

It can also be a question of belief. Where are you on this? Where are you on justification by grace or predestination? Where are you on the impeachment proceedings? The sales tax issue? Immigration? Where are you on whatever matter is currently under debate? Sometimes that’s what is meant by *ayeka*. Given that Adam and Eve have just eaten the forbidden fruit, I doubt God is very interested in their opinions on the issues of the day.

“Where are you?” can also be a question about status, or progress on a journey. Where are you on that? The great philosopher Martin Buber, shares a story of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the Hasidic Rabbi of Northern White Russia, who was jailed by Czarist police. While in prison, a biblically literate jailer asked the wise rabbi, “How are we to understand that God, the all-knowing, said to Adam: ‘Where are you?’” The Rabbi answered the jailer, “Do you believe that the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation, and every [person] is included in them?” “I believe this,” answered the jailer. “Well then,” said Rabbi Zalman, “in every era, God asks every person, ‘Where are you in your world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?’ God says something like this, ‘You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?’” When the jailer heard his exact age named by the Rabbi he stood up shaken, placed his hand on the Rabbi’s shoulder, and wept.¹

I found this story in a reflection on Rosh Hashanah by Rabbi Marc Gellman. He wrote, “God did not need to ask Adam where he was, it was Adam who needed to be asked; and God does not need to ask each one of us *ayeka*, it is we who need to be asked.” He continues, “The High Holy Days are the season of *ayeka*, the time when we are asked by God together and alone to admit for good and ill where we are, to render a spiritual accounting not of our careers but our compassion, not of our wealth but our wisdom, not of our gains but our gifts, not of our physical fitness but of the fitness of our souls.”² Where are you? Indeed, the scriptures are eternal and in every age they speak to every one of us. We are included in them. Where are you today? How would you respond to God’s first question in scripture?

Adam and Eve were hiding from God. Having eaten the forbidden fruit, having disobeyed their creator, having reached beyond the boundaries of their lives to be their own gods, they found themselves hiding from God. This is kind of a silly place to be, imagining they could hide from the Lord God who made heaven and earth, thinking that would work. “God will never find us behind the hydrangea, Eve—quick, over here!” In this unholy game of hide and seek, Adam and Eve are really the lost ones. Hiding in fear of God, covering themselves with fig leaves, which are more like sandpaper than velvet, lost from the beauty and abundance of the garden, lost in their attempt to be their own gods, lost from being who God created them to be.

Ayeka? Where are you? How far along are you on your journey? Are you where God has called you to be? Are you where you ought to be? At some point in our lives, we all know what it is to be Adam and Eve. At some point on the journey, we’ve all breached a boundary, finding ourselves hiding from God, imagining if we just stay still we won’t be noticed. Or perhaps if we just keep our eyes down and look busy. Or like a small child, if we cover our face, then maybe God will go away. If I can’t see God, God must not be there. So we cover our faces with our hands, or with our masks, or with all the outward signs of our lives, hiding from God—silly as that is.

Of course, Adam and Eve, lost as they were, were found. They were found out. They had to face the consequences of their actions—not that they were eager to do so. “Have you eaten of the tree I commanded you not to eat?” asks God, knowingly. And how do they respond? “The woman, whom you gave me, she made me eat it.” “The serpent, he tricked me.” I’ve always wondered what would have happened if Adam simply said, “Yes, Lord. I’ve done what I should not have done, and I take full

¹ This story is related by Rabbi Gellman—see footnote #2.

² Marc Gellman. “Where Are You, Adam?” in *First Things*, vol. 63, May 1996. Copyright (c) 1996 by First Things
Cited here: <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9605/articles/gellman.html>

responsibility for my actions, accepting any consequences you decide.” Imagine a world where we all actually take responsibility for ourselves and our actions. That would be a paradise indeed.

Ayeka? Where are you? That’s the first question God asks in the Bible, God’s question to Adam and Eve, and God’s question to us. God doesn’t need to ask the question; we need to be asked the question every now and then to find ourselves, to come to terms with where we really are along life’s journey. The good news is that we serve a God who asks the question. God knows we need to be asked. The good news is that God seeks us out when we are lost. The good news is God cares enough about us to find us and to help us find ourselves again, no matter how lost we get.

Today we celebrate this God who cares enough about us to come and seek us out, the God who comes among us in Jesus of Nazareth, who by faith we call “The Christ,” the Christ who lived for us, who died for us, who rose for us, who reigns for us, who calls to us, “follow me.” Today, on this World Communion Sunday, we remember how broad our God’s love really is, for God finds us wherever we are, from the Kasai of the Congo, to Bududa, Uganda, to Ahuachapán, El Salvador, to Remedios, Cuba, to Debrecen, Hungary and every place in between. Today God calls to us all, “Ayeka? Where are you? Supper is ready. Come, and be found. Come take your place at the table. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.” Thanks be to God! Amen.