

**Returning to the Embrace of God**  
**March 11, 2013**  
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So there are a few things that we just don't like, as people.

And it's kind of a general thing....

...Something that's just a part of our common human experience.

\*One, is we don't like to admit when we've made a mistake.

Some of us admit our mistakes more readily than others,

for the sake of upholding a sense of honor.

But... even when we're able to pull the strength out of ourselves to speak the words....

we still don't like having to do it, when the time comes. It's still painful. Awkward.

\*Another is, we have a hard time being in the presence of someone

we think we've possibly wronged, or disappointed.

Tends to make us feel just a wee bit uncomfortable.

Tends to make us feel just a little small. Sometimes even defensive.

\*And another is, when we feel scared...confused...

...unsure of ourselves, and who we are... for whatever reason...

(we all know this happens to each of us from time to time. Just part of being a person.) ...

...we tend to draw inward, and away.

To separate ourselves from the life around us.

...Maybe just as a way of trying to regroup all of the scattered stuff inside.

...Maybe as a way to escape all of the stuff around us,

causing us to feel so crumpled apart inside,

so we don't end up losing even more of ourselves in the meantime.

All of this is pretty common to each of us. Doesn't matter who you are...it happens.

Just a part of breathing, and walking, and growing.

But these tendencies inside of us aren't necessarily a good thing, or a helpful thing.

Because all of them lead to a sort of hiding. A tucking away.

A balled up withdrawal from the life around us.

And in doing that, we sort of lose touch with world for a while.

...We even tend to lose touch with ourselves, as inwardly drawn as we are in those moments.

Communication stops.

And any of us who've been around for a while,

knows that communication is the key to keeping things good and okay.

Not only for us, but for each of the faces, and hearts, and lives around us

as we experience this shared world, together.

[

As sort of a lighter example, just the other day,

Ky asked me very specifically to do something for him while he was at work,

which I'd forgotten about completely, until he walked in the door.

But what did I do when I heard him come home?

Did I go out there and share with him what had happened? Of course not.

I stayed in the study for as long as I could,

and spent the rest of the night being as evasive as possible about it,

just hoping he wouldn't notice!

As a heavier example, when I was laid off three years ago...

...Just at the moment I needed the most support---the most love---

from anywhere I could find it,

I drew away from the very people who could give it.

Didn't talk to my mom or my dad about it for a while.

I didn't answer their phone calls, and called them as seldom as I could manage... ]

This hiding—we do it a lot with each other.

And we do it with Someone else, a lot too, right?

We do it a lot with that One Life we can never escape.

That one Presence that is all around us and inside of us, no matter where we go--

---No matter how far we run.

When we're feeling defensive about a mistake we've made...

...when we feel we might have done something disappointing....

...When we we're afraid and lost, and unsure of who we are...

... we try to hide from God, too, don't we?

We tuck away. Our communication stops, and we pull inside of ourselves...

... so lost in all of the scattered stuff in our minds.

Our biblical texts talk about this a lot.

---This tendency inside of us to try to separate ourselves from God in our lowest moments.

In Genesis... the story of Adam and Eve---the story of all of us...

They bite deep into that delicious proverbial apple...

mmm... seemed so good at the time...

Then the writer tells a story of God “walking” through the garden,

And what do Adam and Eve do immediately?

....They hide. They cover themselves. They tuck away.

In our gospel reading for today... the story of the prodigal son...

Another story of this hiding... this running...

out of a sense of fear, and shame over a mistake, and worry for disappointment...

...When this man hits his low, he stays far away, from his father...

...feeling himself fall even lower and harder,

Desperate for the slightest sense of comfort and still finding none, on his own.

These stories are inside of this book because they are the story of us.

We all feel this stuff. We all go through it.

It's a part of our spiritual experience with God,

just as it's a part of our common experience with each other.

But what happens in all of these?

What happens to Adam and Eve?

What happens to the prodigal son?

Do these stories end with them ever being alone?

After all they do to get away, do they ever end with them still wandering, lost?

Genesis ch 3: 8 They 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. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

From Luke, Ch 15... the prodigal son...

17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

See, we do this hiding with each other a lot...

...and sometimes it leads to a lot of separation between *us*...

...brothers, sisters, parents, friends... sometimes for the rest of our lives...

But these texts... and far more than that---our own experience of life in our souls---

Show us that this is impossible to do with God.

Thankfully, and truly, and gratefully, we can run from God, we can hide from God,

We can ignore God, and block out our sense of God...

... but God is always there. With you. In the deepest parts of your mind.

...In the deepest parts of your soul. Past the pit of your heart.... (Psalm 139)...

God is there. And God is always holding you.

Just waiting for you to turn around. And feel that love there all around you,

...and return your own arms and your own love to that One who will never leave you.

That's the truth of our lives in God, that these stories remind us of...

That's what our experience of God each day we wake up, tells us again and again.

...But there's something else, too...

Something else all of these stories and the moments of our own lives remind us of,

on top of this beautiful and steadfast truth.

With other churches during this 4<sup>th</sup> week of Lent,

we're asked, when looking at these texts, and these moments of our own lives,

To focus on the importance of honest human speech.

...Between each other, certainly...

but even more importantly, through those words we're willing to share with God...

...who hears them, and answers them,

and delivers us from the burden of bondage we place over ourselves,

to freedom and possibility of the soul.

All of these things testify that even before we speak,

God, as loving parent, and friend, and companion, waits for us,

his sometimes wandering children.

As Robert read from the story of Joshua... God, as provider, gives manna---

--support, sustenance to us---even while we wander, lost.

God waits on us, listens to us, plans for us, and reaches out to us...

But it's not all easy....

we still have some agency in all of this.

We're still asked to move on our own part.

--To do something, to *act*, ourselves.

In all of this.... Because God is always there,

Because God is the one who never leaves,

It's up to us to let ourselves receive that love.

It's up to us to turn around, and return our own embrace as God holds us...

No matter where we are, no matter how low we find ourselves in our lives...

It's up to us to willingly share ourselves with God.

To be honest with God.

As people in real relationship with God, we can't hold ourselves back,

sharing ourselves with God only when we feel at our best. At our cleanest. Looking sharp...

...Feeling connected in mind and action to the holy.

No. Like in any real and intimate relationship we have with *people*...

... we're drawn to stay with God and talk to God, at *all* times---

---when our hair's messed up, when our breath smells.

When we haven't drawn a line of makeup over our unwashed skin.

Like with the people we're most intimate with in our lives,

to know that through all of this, God still holds us,  
 because God loves you and understands you,  
 and knows you're beautiful however and wherever you are.

As people living in the heart of God,  
 we're called to still share ourselves, even when we want no one to see.  
 To speak our deepest failings and fears, to God,  
 because to be silent--to hold everything inside--is to waste away.

Just as with all of these texts, where we read about our shared experience of God,  
 Jesus lived this truth by example, perfectly and amazingly,  
 in ways that open our own minds and souls to real understanding.  
 ...To real connection.

Just a little while later, in Luke, after Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son---in ch 22...  
 he finds himself in struggle. In fear. In doubt.

Verse 39:

Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. 40 When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." 41 Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." 43 Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. 44 In his *anguish* he prayed more *earnestly*, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

That night in the Garden of Gethsemane,  
 was one of the lowest moments of his life, as we know it.

Jesus—Yeshua-- finds himself

in the most trouble he'd been in since starting his ministry.

He finds himself wanting to even move away from the place God called him to be.

But unlike Adam and Eve...unlike the prodigal son... unlike so many of us so often do...

...he doesn't run. He doesn't clam up or turn away from God.

In that moment, though he feels furthest away from where he should be,

he doesn't try to escape that truth, or the life around him.

He goes to God. He shares himself with God.

And in his anguish prays all the more earnestly.

All the more openly. All the more needfully...

Letting God know how he was, when he felt most afraid,

And most distant from who he knew himself to be.

And that's a moment which should be ours, too.

That's the way you and I are meant to be with God, ourselves.

So, in the middle of this Lenten season as we move toward Easter...

...remembering the resurrection of Christ and the rebirth of our own souls in God...

...and outside of that, in the middle of *any* day

you're blessed to experience God's creation all around you, and inside...

When you screw up your fasts.

When you mess up with people.

When you mess up with yourself...

...Know that the more you feel drawn away from God,

the more important it is and the more crucial it is  
 to the health of your soul, to turn to God,  
 to be honest with God about where you are,  
 and feel God hold you.

When you feel the least worthy of what God has given you. Turn to God.

When you've done your worst at living  
 and moving into the place God's called you to be. Turn to God.

When you know you've sinned---when you know you've made a mistake---  
 ---turn to God. Let God hold you.

In the *middle* of your sin—your mistake. Turn to God.

---Because God *knows* who God created. God knows you're not perfect.

Let God hold you...

...Because there in the love and hold of God is where you *always* are.

...And because, it's true, what the psalmist said in Psalm 32, when he wrote:

Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. 7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah 8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Wherever you are. Wherever you go. Whatever you do....

You live and breathe in the heart of God.

And that's a heart that knows you better than you know yourself, in all moments.

...A heart that loves you forever.

So let yourself feel it. Especially when you need it most.

Let God lift you up from that low place and unfold you

To return to yourself and to the life all around you.

Turn into God's arms, and let God love you.

Amen.