

Pentecost 3B 2018

(Last) summer I attended a family reunion in New Hampshire. Among those in attendance were a whole troop of children 6 to 9 years old. They are all cousins, and don't have many opportunities to be together over a long weekend. When they weren't playing games in the lake's shallow water, they were (playing) hide 'n go seek. The game went on well for 20 minutes or so, before the younger kids complained about not getting to hide good enough. As they talked, they attempted to create a whole new culture for the age-old game. I was amazed at how creative, and how manipulative those kids could be to be able to get a fair shake in the game.

(Of course), the older kids who in earlier summers were the little kids resisted every proposed change. No! This is how it is!

We've been here before, haven't we? (In the) Garden of Eden, the humans are hiding. The story is just like it was 3 summers ago, but we are all three years older now. You know, it doesn't really matter how old you are, the story is the story. The Lord, Yahweh, up close and personal is here. The Lord, (Yahweh) the anthropomorphized image of the God.... who walks in the Garden like a human, and who seeks the two humans like being "it" in hide 'n go seek.

We've been here before, strapped with the shame of choices that we have made. We are strapped with the (shame) of our own choices, our missed opportunities, and our life priorities. And just last Sunday we confessed all of those sins, we (did,) and just last Sunday we heard the promise that all of those sins are forgiven and gone. But, here we are again....(sinful) and shameful and so we hide so that not only God, but all those other people who look up to us won't see what we have done in thought, word, and deed. And here we go again.

("Adam), where are you?" I believe the Lord didn't know where they had chosen to hide. You can hear it in God's voice. It was true concern, where are you? And when you are playing hide 'n go seek you hide, and even if "it" is your best friend you don't want to get found. So you hide harder.

(See,) shame can do that to you. Shame is like guilt on steroids. Shame has its fingers gripped firmly around our hearts and souls. Shame is a wicked master because shame will always let others become your critics, despite the deep embarrassment you already feel.

What was their shame? Nakedness, sure, (but the) breadth of knowing right from wrong is huge! Adam and Eve came to understand its power. It was a power I am sure that they did not want....but, once you decide to do something or see something.....there is no going back after you've done it. That picture or action gets tattooed on your memory.

It didn't take too long for the dark side of shame to come to light. The dark (side of) shame is blame. The shamed uses blame as a shield from the truth. Listening (closely) to blame it doesn't take too long to understand the intent of blame is to shift the weight of shame onto someone else.

(Adam) did you eat of the fruit? That woman...the one YOU gave me....she made me do it. Blame is quick to point the questioning authority away the truth of guilt. Blame (is a) regular tool in the toolbox of contemporary political figures. Before guilt or shame shadows your actions...you can place the blame upon your adversaries. (The) Lord said, "woman?" It was not me! That serpent made me do it. Blame, blame, blame.....

It happens, doesn't it? (When) Jesus had the chance for a long-weekend in Nazareth, he was met by broken people, sinful people struggling with life, people who were in over their heads in terms of responsibilities and duties. Each of (them) wanted Jesus' touch. Each of them wanted to know the refreshment of the love that forgives. Mercy can change your life. Mercy is the act of casting off shame and blame...and claiming the balanced gift of faithfulness and love. That is what set Jesus apart. Instead of shaming the people, Jesus built the people up. Instead of blaming the people for the world's mess, he offers an accessible (lifestyle) of grace, of mercy, of encouragement, of welcome to anyone.

Jesus welcomed the fragile ones of his (day) and mercified them. He challenged the shamers of his day to acknowledge their own shame, and then he offered mercy. Have you been mercified?

But....that's not how the world works! Someone is thinking that right this moment, huh! (Blamers)-shamers fill the news. Blamer-shamers claim the righteousness. Blamers-shamers point at everyone else, and they tell us to be afraid....be very afraid. The fear that shame bears with it can be enough for whole families or communities to shut down; to close their doors to "people not like them." And if the wave of those people comes, say the blamer-shamers, everything you have ever known will be gone.

(That's) what the teachers of the law feared. If Jesus' mercy continues to heal people the tide will turn. If Jesus' mercy continues to (enlarge) the tent, and extend the table to include everyone, what we have known will be no more.

And what, exactly is it that we have known, even from the Garden of Eden? (We) have known the love of the Creator, and the paradise God handed to us. (We) have known the burden of knowing good and evil, and we confess that despite God's mercy given (last) Sunday...the following Sunday we say, we've been here before.....seeking mercy, and acknowledging the shame we heap upon others because they are....what? (Sinful)....as sinful as whom? Me. And remind us all of that gift....that complete (love) of God that Jesus gives us to remove our sin and shame....(you) have been mercified....haven't you? You have...and like (that game) we played as kids, God always seeks us to come out of hiding....to turn around; to know you are redeemed....to invite (you) to the Lord's supper....and to join in the dance of heaven and earth. You have been forgiven. You have been made new. You have been invited to the feast. You (have) been encouraged to dance. You have been mercified. Set down the shame you carry silently. Set down the blame you are so ready to use on someone. We've been here before...and here we are again. Alley-allie in-come-free. It's almost time to eat. Amen.