

God With Us: In the Garden

Genesis 1:26-31; 2:5-7, 15-17; 3:8-11

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And friends, it's great to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, we are glad that you're with us this morning. And as you can figure out by the singing, the decorations and whatnot, this is the first Sunday of Advent. And so we are taking a break from our sermon series in the Sermon on the Mount. So we almost made it. We only have two more sermons left. So we'll pick that back up in January and complete our series in the Sermon on the Mount then. But for the next few weeks, we're going to take a break from that and focus our attention on a new series for the Advent season. And during the Advent season, it's pretty normal. It's common for the church to take a break and maybe focus on passages that speak of the coming of Jesus. That's what Advent means, that he's coming, right? And so we might look at Old Testament prophecy that point to the coming of Jesus, or we might look at the birth narratives in the Gospels that describe the coming of Jesus, or we might do like we did a few years ago and talk about Jesus' second coming. That he's returning. So we could do one, you know, a series like that, but this year we're going to do something a little bit different.

Because Jesus is God with us, that's what we're told. That's what he is, Emmanuel, God with us. We actually heard it in our Old Testament reading this morning. He is Emmanuel, God with us. And so in his coming, in his taking on flesh and dwelling amongst us, he was with his people. He dwelt with his people. But as we look throughout the Bible, both in the Old as well as New Testaments, we have occasions where God is with his people in other places and at other times, where God's presence is made manifest to his people. And so that's what we're going to do during this Advent season. We're going to look at various passages where God is in the midst of his people, where he is with them. So for instance, next week, we're going to look at God with us on the mountaintop with Moses. And then we'll look at God in the temple with Isaiah. And then we'll, you know, hit the climax, God with us as he appears in the manger. And then after that, we'll look at God with us in heaven. But before we get there, we're going to start this morning where the Bible starts, and that's in Genesis. God with us in the garden.

So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Genesis chapter 1. It's really easy to find, right? It's probably like page 1 of your Bibles. Maybe 2 if you have a table of contents. But we're going to look at Genesis 1, and we're going to look at part of Genesis 2 and part of Genesis 3 this morning as we contemplate and consider what it was like to be with God in the garden. What is he revealing to us about himself and about us? So let's read Genesis 1. We'll begin in verse 26. Just let me give you some context because that's verse 26 of the first chapter. So there were 25 things that came before it, right? So this is day 6 of the creation week. So God's created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He's coming to the end of his creation. That's where we are now, okay? So verse 26.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (ESV)

Now let's move to chapter 2, verse 5.

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (ESV)

Let's jump to verse 15 of chapter 2.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (ESV)

And finally, let's jump ahead to chapter 3, verse 8.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can meet with you now. And we ask that by the work of your spirit and the ministry of your word, that you would meet with us, that you would show us what it means to be your people. And you would teach us more about who you are as our God. And so we ask the Lord, open our eyes, be present amongst us. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, Bill Bryson is a writer and author. Maybe some of you are familiar with one of his books, *A Walk in the Woods*, a wonderful accounting of his attempt to traverse the Appalachian Trail. He's a very, very funny writer. If you haven't read that book, I would highly encourage it. I mean, we are near the AT after all. So it's a great book. But there's

another book that I actually really appreciate by him. And it's a memoir of his childhood. It's called *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*. That's what he calls himself, the Thunderbolt Kid. And he recounts different stories of his childhood, growing up in the Midwest in the 1950s and 60s. He tells stories about his parents and his friends in his little town. And there's this one story that he tells about a family vacation that his parents took him on. You see, his father had decided that he wanted to see Disneyland. And so he put everyone into the station wagon, and they drove across the country to go to Disneyland. Now, this was Disneyland in its infancy, right, before it became what it is now. Before it became this, like, multinational behemoth, right? It was just a theme park at the time. And they went. And Bryson talks about it. He says, "in those days, it was a considerably less slick and manicured wonder than it would later become. But it was still the finest thing I had ever seen. Possibly the finest thing that existed in America at that time. My father was positively enchanted with the place. With its tidiness and wholesomeness and imaginative picture set charm. And he kept asking rhetorically, 'why all the world couldn't be like this?'"

You see, Bryson and his father had experienced something that they had never experienced before. Something unlike anything else that they had ever seen or heard or witnessed. And it stirred in his dad a longing for that to be all the time. He had experienced goodness and innocence and beauty. And because he had a small taste of these things, he didn't want his experience to simply be limited to a small place in Southern California. No, he wanted all the cities that they came across. He wanted his hometown. He wanted all of his experiences to be like this one. He longed for that innocence, for that beauty, for that grace to continue. And we know what that's like, don't we? Because when we have tastes of innocence, when we have glimpses of beauty, when we experience just a little bit of grace, we know that we want it again. And that just a little bit is never enough. We want more of it. We want more beauty, more innocence, more purity, more grace. See, once isn't enough. We long for more.

Beauty

And we long for more of these things because these things are echoes of Eden. They're what God created in the very beginning. An aching that we experience now is an aching that things should be better. Things should be peaceful. Things should be beautiful. We have that aching because that's how we were first made. We were made for beauty. We were made for a beautiful relationship. That's actually what we see in Genesis 1 and 2. We know Genesis 1 is the creation account, right? God created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain over the course of six days. And then on the sixth day, when he had created everything, he had one last thing to make. The pinnacle of his creation, he created man and woman, right? And so in Genesis 1, we have the creation week. And at the end of every day, God says, it is good. But then on the sixth day, when he creates man, he looks upon all his creation and now it is very good. So Genesis 1 is this wide-angle lens view of God's creation, of his creation week. But then in Genesis chapter 2, we have a zooming in of the creation of man. And when we zoom in, we hear that God formed Adam out of the dust. And in verse 7 of chapter 2, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature. And then we're told in doing this, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

Okay, so this is what happens, right? God takes the dust, he takes a portion of it, and he forms the man out of the dust. But Adam isn't living yet. He's just, you know, dust man. I don't know what we would call him, right? He's just formed. He's just there. But then God breathes into him. And as he does so, life erupts. I was trying to think of an illustration that is

analogous to this event. And really, there isn't one. There isn't one. Like, the closest thing I could come up with is when you have embers in your fireplace and you blow air on them and they erupt into flame. But the problem with that is that the embers still have some flame, right? There's still some warmth. Like, we have charcoal embers. I guess they're not embers anymore. Cold charcoal in my fireplace right now. If you go to my home and you get on your hands and knees and you blow on that charcoal, nothing's going to happen. We know that because we do not have the power or the ability to cause them to erupt into flames. But God did. He blew on basically cold embers and brought life. That is the power of God.

He breathed into Adam. And when there was once no life, now there is life. And when Adam opened his eyes for the first time and breathed on his own for the first time, the first thing that he would have seen was the Lord. I mean, think about that. The first thing he would have seen is the one in whose image he was made. Adam and Eve, from their first breath, were living in the presence of God. We're told in Genesis 3 that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. And we get the sense this isn't an anomaly. This isn't strange. This isn't just a one-off. No, that God was walking in the garden regularly. That it was expected that this was his place of domain. In fact, that word walked, it means literally to walk to and fro. He didn't just enter and leave, but he meandered. He walked in his domain and amongst his creation and with those made in his image. I mean, y'all, that is incredibly beautiful.

That there was this wonderful relationship that existed between God and his image bearers. I mean, that's what he declares them to be, right? His image bearers. And so it's important for us to say a couple things about the image of God, or the Latin phrase is *Imago Dei*. This name, this designation that is given to humanity, it's incredibly dignifying. It's value giving. And this is important for the original hearers, so I want you to think about this. So Moses is the writer of Genesis. And Moses is writing to the first generation that is coming out of Egypt. So this is the first generation of the Exodus community. And they had been in Egypt for hundreds of years. And so that meant that they were enslaved, and they were treated poorly, and they were dehumanized, and their value was only found in their ability to obey their masters. That's who they were. That's how they had been treated. That's what they would have been called, slaves. But now, as they have left Egypt and are moving towards the promised land, what does Moses remind them of and tell them? You are made in the image of God. You are not less than human. No, you are *Imago Dei*. You are not slaves. You are the people of God. That's who they were, the image of God, and that's who we are. Y'all, that is incredibly dignifying.

Nothing else in all of creation, not the angels, not the animals, not the plants, nothing is made in the image of God except for man and woman. That is amazing. It's incredibly dignifying, and it's incredibly humbling. It's humbling because though we are *Imago Dei*, we're still creatures, right? We're creatures of the sixth day. We're the last that God created, and he made and formed us not because of anything that we had done, because we didn't even exist yet, right? There was no reason for him to make us except for out of his good pleasure. He made us to have this beautiful relationship with him, and that's what Adam and Eve had. God dwelt with them in the garden. I mean, I can't even imagine what those days must have been like. The beautiful harmony that they would have had with one another. I mean, like, think about the best day you've ever had with your spouse, with your child, with your best friend. The best day, right? Where it's like, I just want this day to never end, and it's not even close to what this would have been like. It pales in comparison, because that beautiful day that we experienced with our spouse, our friend, our kids, I mean, the beauty gets lost, doesn't it? I mean, it's just unimaginable, the harmony that they would have had with one another and

with the Lord. The Lord walking with them in the garden amongst his creation, with his image bearers. It is a beautiful picture of how things are supposed to be, and that's the key word there. Supposed to be, because we know that the beauty's been lost.

Shame

This reminds me of an article that was in the 2003 edition, March edition of *The Atlantic magazine*. A writer named David Hadju was writing about an encounter he had, an experience he had, at the Village Vanguard, which is a jazz club in Greenwich Village in New York City. And David Hadju, he just happened to walk into the club this night. He didn't know who was playing. He wasn't expecting anything out of the ordinary. He just walked in, and he wanted to listen to some jazz. And so he sat there, and after a few songs, the band kind of quieted down, and the trumpeter came forward. And the trumpeter started to play a solo. It was a song, *I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You*. And he started to play, and David Hadju started to listen closely, and he started to look attentively, and he realized this wasn't just any trumpeter. This was Winston Marsalis.

Now, I am not a jazz aficionado by any stretch of the imagination. But in doing a little bit of research, it turns out that Winston Marsalis is one of the greatest trumpeters in the world. And there he was, no fanfare, no announcement, standing at the front of the stage playing his trumpet. And Hadju said that he played this incredible song, and he was bringing every note to a dramatic point and hitting every note, and he would hit it, and he would allow the note to just hang in the air before he moved on. And he came to this point where it was clear that he was pausing for effect, and he was about to move into the finale, into the climax of the song, the crescendo. It was quiet. And right as he is about to blow his trumpet, a cell phone rang, and a sing song melody of electronic beeps replaced the beauty of the trumpet. And Hadju pulled out his pad of paper and wrote simply, magic ruined.

And y'all, that's what happened to us. The beautiful relationship, the dwelling with God, it was ruined. Beauty was replaced with shame. God gave Adam and Eve one prohibition, do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One prohibition, and that's what they did. They sinned and disregarded God's word, and they lived as a law unto themselves. They ate and brought sin into the world, and that has affected everything, not just them. Human death is introduced, relationship between man and woman is disrupted. The beautiful relationship we had with God, it is ruined. The magic is ruined. That's what we're told in chapter 3 verses 8 - 11. "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves with the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked. I hid myself. And he said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" I mean, the contrast between Genesis 1 and 2 and Genesis 3 is stark, because at the end of creation, when God had made Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden and gave them work to do, we are told that they were naked and unashamed. But now they recognize their nakedness, and they're filled with shame. And so they hid.

It's incredibly sad, because prior to this, when they heard the sound of God, their hearts would have skipped with excitement. Joy would have filled their minds. Comfort would have overwhelmed their souls. But now they ran to hide. They don't want to be seen. They don't want to be noticed. They don't want to be known. The Old Testament commentator, Gordon

Wenham, he says that a more complete transformation could not be imagined. The trust of innocence is replaced by the fear of guilt. The trees that God created for man to look at are now his hiding place to prevent God seeing him. And to make matters worse, when they are brought out of hiding, what do they do? They start to blame shift, right? It's the serpent's fault. He deceived me. It's Eve's fault. She gave me the fruit. No, it's your fault, God, because you gave me the woman.

But there's something else here. In verse 10, I want you to look closely at chapter 3, verse 10. There's something here I have never noticed. I have read this passage hundreds of times, and I never noticed this. Adam said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid." Now, you know what I expected to read? And I have always thought I read, because I ate. That's not what he says, is it? He says, "because I was naked." Why was he afraid? Why did he hide? Not because of his sin, not because of guilt, but because he was naked and ashamed. The Jewish Old Testament commentator Umberto Casuto says that "Adam dares not lie before his creator, but he is not yet willing to avow his sin. Hence, he strives to turn the conversation to another subject, the last thing that happened after his transgression." So, you hear that? Adam, even though he confesses, was only telling so much. You get the sense that Adam is doing everything he can not to say what actually happened. Even when he's exposed, he's still trying to hide.

And we know all about this, don't we? Because we hide. We hide from one another. We hide from God. We even hide from ourselves. No, we don't hide behind trees and buildings. We hide by confessing our sin to one another, but only confessing enough to get our friend to stop asking. And we confess to God, but we only confess enough to feel a reprieve from the guilt we're experiencing. And we hide from ourselves by telling ourselves it's really not that bad. Sure, I lusted. I gossiped. I spoke critically of that person. I made an insensitive comment. I've been greedy, gluttonous. But it's not that bad. I didn't kill someone. I didn't rob. I didn't commit an affair. You see, we convince ourselves that it's not that bad, and so we confess. But we confess acceptable sins because we don't want to have to deal with the deeper ones. We hide. And we hide because we're ashamed. Adam hid. He minimized. He deflected. And we've been doing it ever since. And because of that relationship that we had with God, that one that we were made for, the beauty that we once had, it was now replaced with shame.

Hope

But that's not the end of the story. You know, Marsalis, when the phone rang and it ruined the magic of the moment, the crowd in that jazz club, they recognized the moment was lost. And the people started to giggle, and they started to talk, and they moved on. When Marsalis didn't put his trumpet down, he remained at the microphone. And in a moment, he started to replay the silly cell phone melody now on his trumpet. And he repeated it again and again. And he started to improvise it, and he started to play variations of it, and the crowd stopped chatting. And they actually turned back and looked at him. And he continued to improvise until he had adapted it so much that he worked it back into the original song. And he seamlessly picked up where he left off. He took what was shameful, and he redeemed it. And friends, that's what God is doing.

That is where our hope is, that the hiding and the shame is not the end of the story, but that there is hope. In Genesis 3, verse 15, a verse that we didn't read this morning, in the midst of God bringing curse upon Adam and Eve and the serpent, he says to the serpent, "I will put

enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This is what theologians call the *protoevangelium*. It means first gospel. God declares a promise of hope. He declares that their shame and their sin and this broken relationship is not the end of the story. God is declaring shame and punishment and sin will not win, that there will be one who will come and redeem them and redeem us from our sin and shame. What is amazing about this, think about this y'all, God encounters them right after they sinned.

And he doesn't go away, and he doesn't start thinking, “well maybe I should do away with them. Maybe I should wipe the slate clean. Maybe I should call a mulligan and start all over.” No, instead, immediately, he has a plan to redeem them. You are my people. You are my image bearers. He's going to redeem them. He's going to redeem us. That is the hope of the gospel. That is the hope of the gospel that was declared in Genesis 3, and we know that that is the truth of the gospel lived out in Christ. Because Jesus is the one who crushes the serpent's head, who gives life through going to the cross, who lived and died and rose again, so that our sins would be forgiven and we would be restored to God. So that we would no longer have to hide, but that God would redeem that relationship.

Hadji said that when the audience witnessed and heard Marsalis redeem that moment, he wrote, the ovation was tremendous. They rejoiced because the magic had returned, because the beauty had been restored. They rejoiced, and friends, so too do we, because we who were once lost, we who were overcome with shame, we who because of our sin were distant from God, were separated from him. We are those for whom Jesus has taken that shame and wiped it away, and he has redeemed and restored that relationship with God, so that we are now with him. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you. Thank you that you did not leave us in our sin and in our shame. You did not leave us in our brokenness and in our rebellion, but instead through Christ, you redeemed us. You restored us. You are making all things new. And so, we pray Father, that we would look to Christ. And that we would rejoice in what he has done. That we would confess our sin and come out of hiding. That we would live in the light, knowing that you redeem. You forgive. That you are gracious. That you have restored that beautiful relationship. And so Father, help us to live in light of that. Help us to live as your redeemed people. And we pray all of this in Christ's name. And God's people said together, Amen.