

Pentecost 2, June 6, 2021 (Mk 3:20-35; Gen 3:8-15; Ps 130; 2 Cor 4:13-5:1)

Once upon a time there was God, who was literally *bursting* with creativity. His imagination brought forth the heavens and the earth, and light from the darkness. He spoke *into being* the sky and the dry lands, and he brought under his control all the waters of chaos, and he made the seas.

After that God's creativity produced vegetation—plants and seeds. And it was still only the third day. The next day there appeared the sun and the moon and the stars. On the fifth day there were sea creatures and birds. And on the sixth day God made the creatures of the land, and finally, in his own image, God made humankind.

And then *sin* happened. One of God's creatures turned against God and deceived the woman, who tempted the man, who blamed God for creating the woman. And that's how the world has gone since then.

Sin comes in many sizes and shapes, many guises and forms. It seems to be human nature to play the "blame game" when we're caught out—and because God is God, we can never hide from him.

But listen to how God's story of love unfolds in our texts today. **The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."**

Of course God knew immediately that his newly-created children had broken the only command he'd given them: *Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* Now God had a problem. His beloved ones had sinned. They recognized good and evil, right and wrong; and already on that sixth day of creation they felt guilt and shame and fear. And while God had planned that his children should live forever in that garden of perfect peace and abundance, now he had to reconsider.

He had to reconsider because in the center of that garden, which we call Eden, was another special tree: the tree of life. If the man and the woman were to eat of *that* tree, they would live forever. Can you imagine living forever oppressed by guilt and shame? Can you imagine cringing your way through an eternal earthly life afraid that God might see and know your sin?

God was too soft-hearted, too merciful, to allow that to happen. So God banished the man and his wife from the garden. Their lives would be more difficult, but at least those difficult lives, contaminated with sin, wouldn't last forever.

Psalm 130 could be the cry of Adam and Eve, who were ashamed of their sin and naked before their all-knowing God. **Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are to be worshiped. . . . With the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption.**

My heart hurts for all people who don't know God well enough to trust his forgiveness of all our sins—the forgiveness we ask for in the prayer Jesus taught us; the forgiveness that's ours every time we receive his own body and blood.

Among those who never learned to trust Jesus were **the teachers of the law**—the scribes. They accused him of being possessed by the prince of demons, Beelzebul, one of the false gods worshiped by the Philistines.

By this time in Mark's gospel—we're only in chapter three!—Jesus has healed a man with an unclean spirit; he's healed Simon's mother-in-law and many other people at Simon's house; he's conducted a preaching tour throughout Galilee, and cleansed a leper, healed a paralytic, and invited a tax collector to follow him.

He's argued with the Pharisees about fasting, and about plucking grain on the Sabbath, and he's healed a man with a withered hand. And just a few verses earlier Mark wrote, **Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God!"**

It's been clear to everyone else—the crowds and the evil spirits—that Jesus is working by the power of God. But the religious authorities are blinded by their own understandings—or *misunderstandings*—of God's plan. Even his own family don't understand Jesus! They think he's out of his mind; they want to take him home. The crowd sitting around Jesus tell him, **Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.**

He responds by looking at the circle of his followers and saying, **Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.** There's a saying that "blood is thicker than water." But for Jesus, blood ties weren't as important as *worship* ties. *We* are bound to Jesus by ties of both blood *and* water.

Through our baptism into Christ we claim the status of children of our heavenly Father, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Through the blood of Jesus, poured out on Calvary for the sins of the world to reconcile the whole of creation to God, we receive assurance again and again of the entire forgiveness of all our sins.

Just twenty years after God raised Jesus from the dead, Paul wrote words of comfort and consolation to the church in Corinth: **We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus . . . Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is *seen*, but on what is *unseen*. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

Whether our suffering is from sin and guilt and shame, or fear, or illness or grief; from loss of family or friend or trust or employment or home—*all that is seen* is temporary.

But one thing that can NOT be seen is God's eternal, never-ending, undying love, his passionate desire that *all the world* shall be saved. *We* know we're saved by the blood of Jesus. Are we truly among those Jesus mentioned in the gospel? **Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.**

By the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, by the power of the love of Jesus active in our lives, we are empowered to *do God's will*: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love and serve our neighbors—all the neighbors God gives us. **What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.**

Jesus loves you passionately. Each of you, and all of you! **Thanks be to God!**