

SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

1st Sunday after Pentecost
Year C

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Text: “We Live, We Love: Leaving Home”

Title: Genesis 3:8-13; 22-24

Have you noticed all the clever Geiko commercials lately? Check this one out.

(Tarzan/Jane clip)

I expect the wives among us especially like that one. Then there's the one about the alligator. People--one of whom is an alligator--are out for a work lunch. At the end of lunch the alligator says “I've got this”, but he can't quite reach the check due to his short arms. Then the punch line: “If you have alligator arms, you avoid picking up the check. It's what you do.”

The worship series we begin today reminded me of these commercials. The series will follow the stories of Genesis. They are the epic, early, family stories of God's relationship with human beings and the relationships those human beings have with each other. My Christian Ethics professor assigned us the book of Genesis to read at the beginning of the class because, he said, contained in those chapters are all the stories of the messiness of human life as people relate to one another and to God. There you'll find family dysfunction, fratricide, polygamy, questions about sexuality, jealousy, family betrayal, slavery, human sacrifice—all kinds of questions and descriptions about the human family and the human-divine relationship. Through all the messiness, however, life goes on and God continues to embrace the people in those stories as God's own children, God's own people. And though people make a mess of things throughout, they continue to live and love: We live. We love. It's what we do. It's the way God created us: to persevere, to live and to love even when life isn't nice and neat and clean. How are we to deal with human frailty and the ways in which our fear shows up in difficult relationships? That is the primary question we'll be considering throughout this summer series: “We live. We Love. It's what we do.”

Our son and daughter-in-law were home two weekends ago to help us on a project for which we'd been saving for about a year and a half: a solid, hardwood floor in the entry, hallway, dining area and living area—about 620 feet of space. Because the builder used particle board as the subfloor we had to pull it all up and put down $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood. The flooring manufacturer will not warranty their product without it. So Josh and Aimee came home and thankfully helped us rip it all up over a couple of days. It was tough work, harder than any of us expected. When they went home a week ago last Monday, he called a few days later to ask how

the project was going. I said fine but it was taking longer than I anticipated. Even though I was using vacation time to install this floor, it was taking much longer than I thought it would, and I was feeling muscles I forgot I had. And he said something every parent appreciates hearing: “I wish we lived closer to home, so I could help you more. Of course,” he went on, “it would also come in handy to have you closer when we start our basement project.”

The truth is, though, that it’s been good for them to leave home, and I told him so. It has given them confidence as a couple, forged their relationship, and instilled in them the experience of trusting each other as they make their way through life. Of course, now that they’ve done that, we’d like to have them closer, but that’s the way life is.

Sometimes leaving home is necessary so that we might know what home really is. That’s not easy though for parents who will say good bye to adult children going off to college or off to a job that takes them away and perhaps leaving an empty nest. There are adjustments to be made. It’s also not easy for someone who’s lost a home. What does it mean when our sense of “home” shifts for whatever reason?

I love the old stories of Genesis. There is much about home in them, and they have much to teach us about what home is really about, what it means to be human, what it means to relate to God.

We pick up the story this morning with God walking in the garden. It’s an idyllic scene: cool evening breeze. The mood is calm and serene: God just taking a stroll through the beauty of creation. As I walked around our yard last week to check out all the emerging ferns and hosta, the delicate drops of the bleeding heart blooms, the strong stalks of the peonies, the Zebra grass shooting up it seems 6 inches a night, the Black Eyed Susans trying to survive the nibbling of the local rabbit couple, the idea of God walking in the garden came to mind. A place of peace. A place in which to enjoy the gifts of God’s creation. A place in which to remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return, that we are part of all this beauty, part of God’s incredible creative Spirit. Like the gardener who enjoys the fruits of his/her labor after planting, God enjoys what God has done with the place, and like everything else God has created, it was good. It was very good!

Yet, something is amiss. The two humans God created are nowhere to be seen. The name of the first human God created is a word play in Hebrew. From the ground—the Hebrew word for “ground” is “adama”, God created the first human—the Hebrew word for “human” is “adam”. But “adam” is nowhere to be found. Neither is the other half of the whole—the woman whom “adam” will call “Eve” which is another play on words in the Hebrew. “Eve” or “havva” resembles the Hebrew word for “living”, as in she gives birth or is the mother of all who are living. “Adam” and “havva” are not to be found.

God becomes suspicious. It’s clear that this isn’t about “hide and seek”. It’s not a game the two humans are playing with God. Something has changed. One gets the sense that the normal pattern when God comes into the garden is that the two humans come running to God like a dog to its owner when he or she walks in the door after work, looking for attention and relationship. Maybe a better image is like that of a child waiting for her parents to come pick her up after a long stay at someone’s home when Mom and Dad have been on vacation without them. She can’t wait to see them and is overjoyed when one of them walks through the door. It’s hard for God to walk anywhere without “adam” and “havva” following nearby.

Like a dog owner gets suspicious when the family pet doesn't greet whoever comes home first, it's not normal for God to have to go looking for them. So God calls out, "Where are you?"

Somewhere from the thick cedars, the man answers. He doesn't give God their location, doesn't really answer God's question which seems a bit odd. Instead, like a guilty child who did what he was told not to do, he responds by telling God "I heard you and I was afraid. Because I was naked I hid myself." The Apostle Paul explained this human tendency well when he confessed in a letter he wrote to the congregation in Rome: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19).

"adam" may have been the first in the Bible to have this inner conflict but he wasn't the last.

God, being the wise parent, probes further: "who told you that you were naked? Did you do what I told you not to do?"

All this time "havva" has been listening, no doubt wiping the sweat from her brow, thankful that the divine Parent God wasn't coming for her, thinking perhaps that she was off the hook given that God asked for "adam" specifically. But like the "true, responsible, mature" companion that he is, "adam" immediately blames "havva" and indirectly God when he responds: "This woman you've created for me: she told me to eat and I ate." So God follows "adam's" lead and the spotlight shifts from "adam" to "havva". "adam" wiping his brow thinking perhaps that he was successful in shifting responsibility for his own irresponsibility to "havva" and even to God. God was the one, after all, who created this other person to be with him. "adam" didn't create her, so who is really at fault here?

God then shifts attention to "havva": "What have you done?" And "havva" with the same kind of courage and self-regulation displayed by her partner, "adam", immediately blames the serpent who after all was also created by God and God called all that God had created good, right? So, again, who is really to blame? Like children in a playground argument blame is passed from one person to the other. It moves in a circle with nowhere to land.

So God indicts all three of them, but "adam" and "havva" are forced to leave the idyllic garden of naiveté in which they were completely innocent and unaware of the fragility of life and the challenges that face adults in the real world. God sends them out of the garden because they are now aware of the realities of life, and they are not to return to their former naïve state. "adam" and "havva" are forced to leave home. But God does not abandon them in this. God cares so much for them that God provides them with clothing to protect them. God is still very much concerned for those God fashioned from the dust of the earth. As any good parent does, God remains the doting one. Though it's time for the two of them to leave home and begin their life together, responsible for their own lives, as a Parent, God will never let go of them. God remains concerned about their welfare.

I don't know if you've ever watched the program "Naked and Afraid". Every once in a while I'll tune in because I'm interested in wilderness survival. As I thought about "adam" and "havva" naked in the garden, the concept of the show ran through my mind. The idea is that a man and a woman who don't know each other are placed in remote locations with very few items. I think they have a bag and one survival item they can bring. They are totally without clothing although the cameras blur body parts so nothing inappropriate is seen. They are placed in these wilderness locations and challenged to survive for 21 days, alone. Personally, I think they are crazy. However, the experience of these couples reveals how difficult life can be without the basic necessities we take for granted. As they shiver in the night—even in tropical regions, as the bugs leave welts, as they deal with threatening animal sounds in the night or the

rains that sometimes soak their shelters and raise goosebumps on cold skin, their experience demonstrates that living without such basic necessities as clothing in the garden which is God's creation is not easy. It's not pleasant. Naked and Afraid: who wants to go back to that?

I couldn't help but think of "adam" as he responds to God: "I was naked and afraid so I hid." What God does with "adam"'s fear is to provide "adam" and "havva" with clothes to protect them and give them what they need to survive. God gives them what they need before they leave home to become adults who are responsible for their own lives outside the garden home in which they were raised. And maybe this leaving home is God's way of reminding us that home really is a treasured place.

Sometimes you have to leave there before you can appreciate what you had there. It's not without its trials and temptations. It's a place in which one person may blame another for actions taken. It's a place in which companions will evade personal responsibility. Still, the presence of God is there. And when it comes time to leave, rest assured that God provides what is needed in order to survive and thrive. God does not abandon us even when we, in the words of Paul, "do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do."

As God's children We live. We love. It's what we do.