

1 Sermon, March 13, 2011

Texts: Genesis 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, Matthew 6:25-30

Title: "Nakedness as Self-Awareness"

1. Adam and Eve story is very current
2. There comes a time when we have to face ourselves
3. Facing ourselves is a moment of spiritual growth
4. Facing ourselves means accepting our present – Matthew 6
5. Facing ourselves means God will be in our future - 1 Corinthians

1. Adam and Eve story is very current

Have you ever had that feeling of saying the wrong thing? The moment the words passed your lips you knew they were wrong?

Maybe you said something without being sure about it first? I know I did that, just recently in Confirmation class, and had to backtrack.

Or maybe you pushed the wrong button, or hit the accelerator instead of the brake?

My parents' condo in Arizona had a big hole punched through the wall because the neighbor put their truck in reverse instead of forward, and the trailer hitch punched through.

Have you ever had that sinking feeling of being caught up short?

That sinking feeling is one of the things that keeps the story of Adam and Eve so relevant to today.

It may be an advertisement instead of a snake. It may be peer pressure instead of Eve cajoling Adam.

We may not eat fruit that gives knowledge, but a sudden realization of a mistake or, worse yet, harm toward another is like swallowing a bitter pill. You just can't take back your words or actions.

Have you ever yelled at your child or criticized your spouse in public? It can't be taken back.

Have you ever just stood there when you knew you should have said something. That silence cannot be redone, either.

You can see why Adam and Eve might want to hide from God.

Their nakedness symbolizes all those embarrassing moments where we have discovered that we have made a bad choice.

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And the fig leaves are simply a cover-up.

Our first sinful reaction to our own sin may be to want to cover it up, like a child who says, "I didn't do it!" — when you know they did. Or like the politician or movie star who tries to explain away a racist remark, and so on et cetera.

2. There comes a time when we have to face ourselves

Being naked is a biblical metaphor for God standing back and allowing us to embarrass ourselves.

It's called free will. God wants us to do the right thing, the thing that imitates God's love, but God gives us the choice. Often, we make a less good choice than we could. It's not always a matter of right and wrong, but more right or more wrong.

Our decisions affect those around us. Our choices display our values. So, whenever we choose, we are choosing how we want to be seen. We discover that others see how we live. Our inner minds are more naked than we think.

Jesus said (Luke 8:17): "nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light."

Adam and Eve discovered that there comes a moment when we have to face ourselves; when we have to look at ourselves with nothing hidden. The scripture says about Adam and Eve that "their eyes were opened." They suddenly saw themselves in a different way. They saw themselves as having something to be ashamed about.

3. Facing ourselves is a moment of spiritual growth

That moment of facing ourselves is a deeply spiritual moment. And it can have several outcomes.

1. We can look at ourselves and reject what we see, and pretend that we're something different.
2. We can look at ourselves and not like what we see, and get depressed.
3. We can look at ourselves and be dissatisfied but patient.

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4. Or we can look at ourselves and accept what we see, even though we don't like everything about ourselves.

This last option is the most spiritual path. All of these outcomes are possible along the journey in which the Holy Spirit guides us. But it is the last outcome, the path toward self-acceptance is the one that brings us closest to God.

The Hymn, "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown," is based on the story in Genesis of Jacob wrestling with an angel. But it's really about coming face to face with oneself and with God.

Charles Wesley, who wrote the hymn, has us sing, demanding to know who this is.

Then we discover who it is:

'Tis love, 'tis love, thou diedst for me! I hear thy whisper in my heart. The morning breaks, the shadows flee, pure universal love thou art.

Wow!

4. Facing ourselves means accepting our present – Matthew 6

The passage from Matthew speaks of the peace of self-acceptance in the present moment. We can, if we trust in God's grace, live without worry, but only depending upon God.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"
Matthew 6:25-30, NRSV.

You could read that passage, where Jesus says "Why worry about clothing?" to mean that Jesus did not think we should wear any. But that would not be true. This is not about nakedness except in a roundabout way.

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Jesus was urging simplicity, not nudity. He urged us to share our clothing because it was a necessary thing, and when someone didn't have any, we should share.

When he sent out his disciples to heal, he said: "Take nothing for the journey--no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. (Luke 9:3)

Not having an extra tunic meant that you would trust God, and not worry about possessions on the mission. You would let nothing get in the way of the mission.

Trusting in God for even the most basic things would allow you to be fully honest with yourself, and we hope, be more accepting of yourself as you are.

5. Facing ourselves means God will be in our future - 1 Corinthians

This sermon is about self-awareness, which is an important Lenten theme. And you can be more self-aware if you're not worrying about tomorrow.

But there is a way in which thinking about the future is not worrying, but trusting in God. We can think of the future, especially the future beyond this life, as a time when we have greater understanding. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:

"as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, NRSV.

Again, it's about trust. It's about trust in God, now and in the future.

Our faith is supposed to lead us to self-awareness, and self-acceptance. If it doesn't do that, maybe we're trying too hard, and not just accepting God's grace.

I was just looking on the internet, at a video on youtube (you can also find it at tapping.com). The guy in the video was tapping himself, and saying, "I accept myself. I accept myself." (He tapped his wrist, between his brows, at the side of his eye, below his nose, etc.)

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I can't tell you if the technique works, but some people believe in it. And I can tell you for certain that if someone is tapping themselves in an airport and saying, "I accept myself," they've already gotten over the embarrassment part.

I prefer to think about doing that same sort of thing with prayer. Because, really, it's not a matter of what I *do* in order to accept myself, as much as receiving the grace of God as a gift.

I can accept myself because God already has.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.