

Sermon for 6-10-18
Genesis 3:8-15 & Mark 3:20-35
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I LOVE summertime. Every year, June's arrival fills me with a kind of uplifting, quiet joy. The longer days, with more time to play outside in the evenings; more opportunities to get fresh air, and the relaxation that brings; sitting on the porch and reading or talking with neighbors; road trips and driving with the windows down; vacation and family time... and we all know that ice cream and popsicles and lemonade taste infinitely better on hot summer nights.

It's all so warm and wonderful; and yet, there's one aspect of summertime that fills me with fear and loathing every year when it arrives -- swimsuit season. Don't get me wrong -- I love the beach, I love swimming and splashing and being in the water, I love basking in the sun's rays (with adequate sunscreen on, of course!) ... but I hate being seen in a bathing suit, having my body exposed.

Like most women I know, I have what you might call a "complex" about my body. So many of us believe, on some level, that our bodies are bad or wrong or shameful. Parts are either too big or too small, too fat or too bony, too droopy or wrinkly or too many blemishes, the wrong shape... there are many variations, but they all center around the same theme. Our bodies are not okay.

I know it's not just women; over time, I've learned from the men in my life that this body anxiety, this complex, belongs to them as well. It might present itself in different ways, but it's that same sense of being either too much or not enough, somehow not okay. This body shame starts early. I grieve a little every time I see a child wearing a t-shirt in the pool, because I know that feeling of desperately wanting to hide my own flesh; and my heart breaks when I see my 6-year-old niece pull at her swimsuit and announce sadly that she wishes her belly were flatter.

Whether intentionally or not, we adults teach our children to hate their bodies, and to see only flaws when they look at themselves, instead of the beautiful and perfect image of God in which they were made. This is one of our many great collective sins.

Speaking of sin -- let's talk about original sin. Our reading from Genesis this morning comes after the temptation, after Adam and Eve have tasted that mysterious forbidden fruit. So often, we focus on that part of the story, that initial act of disobedience; but what if it's this part, this encounter with God, that holds the greatest lessons for us?

Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit, realized they are naked, tried to cover themselves with leaf-clothing, and then, the Scripture says, they hear God taking an evening stroll through the garden.ⁱ This should be a beautiful sound, drawing them in, nearer to their Maker. But instead, Adam and Eve hide from God's presence... it's a painful place to be, estranged from that which is holy and sacred.

God questions them -- where are you hiding? Why?ⁱⁱ Of course, God already knows the answer, just as God knows everything about these first two humans, but God asks anyway. It's like a parent asking a child, 'How did the glass end up broken?' You know the answer, but you want to hear it from them. You want honesty, intimacy, and reconciliation. It's not about the broken glass, it's about the relationship between parent and child. It's about repairing the breach caused by fear and lies and shame. There is love in the question.

Adam tells God -- 'we were afraid, because of our nakedness.'ⁱⁱⁱ Adam and Eve feel exposed, uncovered; they cannot hide their shame... but of course, they were naked before, weren't they? They've been naked all along.

So now, the central question: "Who told you that you were naked?"^{iv}

We may be conditioned to hear God's question in a tone of judgement and righteous anger... but what if we hear it differently? What if we hear it as a parent might ask a child, in a tone of love with a tinge of sadness?

Who told you that?

Who called you that?

Who made you believe that about yourself?

The truth is, Adam and Eve were always naked. They were created naked, in the image of God they were naked, they were perfect and beautiful and whole... in the beginning, they were naked, and God saw that it was good.

The problem was never their nakedness, but their knowledge of their nakedness, and their fear and shame and impulse to cover it all up. The problem was that they listened to the serpent, that damned liar, who told them things about themselves that were not true.

God told them they were good and loved and precious; the serpent told them they were ugly and broken and insignificant, and they believed it. They forgot God's truth about themselves, and believed lies, and those lies gave rise to fear and shame and drove them away from God. LIES... dirty, rotten lies about what God created.

It's the same kind of lies that have Jesus all riled up in today's reading from the Gospel of Mark. Some people (the ones who don't like, or can't accept, his Good News) are saying he's demon-possessed.^v

These lies cannot change the truth about who and what Jesus is. These lies cannot strip away his holiness or power. But these lies are a great evil, and Jesus says so. To call Jesus demon-possessed is to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.^{vi}

Blasphemy is the ultimate sin -- denigrating the holy, denying the sacred. Blasphemy is calling that which God has created dirty or bad or demonic. Blasphemy is denying the goodness and wisdom of God's perfect design; blasphemy is rejecting the beauty and worth of what God has made.

The blasphemy of Mark 3 is calling God's Son, the Messiah, demonic.

The blasphemy of Genesis 3 is calling these two human bodies, created by God in God's own image, dirty and shameful and bad.

Our blasphemies today are too enormous and varied to describe adequately...

We blaspheme when we deny the goodness and worth of God's Creation, "this fragile earth, our island home."^{vii}

We blaspheme when we refuse to see the face of Christ in every person, not just those who are like us.

And we blaspheme when we accept and perpetuate the lies that our own bodies, designed and created by God, are defective and unworthy and wrong.

"Who told you that you were naked?"^{viii}

Who told you that you were ugly, or broken, or bad?

Just as God called out to Adam and Eve in the garden, God is calling each one of us, begging us to come out of hiding, to let go of shame and fear, to ignore the haters and the liars... to step into the light of God's love and believe the truth about ourselves and each other.

You are good, you are precious, you are made in the perfect and beautiful image of God, and you are loved. That's the Gospel truth. Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 3:8

ⁱⁱ Gen 3:9

ⁱⁱⁱ Gen 3:10

^{iv} Gen 3:11

^v Mark 3:22

^{vi} Mark 3:29-30

^{vii} BCP Eucharistic Prayer C, page 370

^{viii} Gen 3:11