

Where are you? Where are you in your relationship with God? God never stops asking, but, too often, we stop listening. When we fall or slide, we aren't where we should be and we aren't where we could be. God's concern for each of us is not where have you been or where are you going. God asks us, 'Where are you right now in your relationship with God?'

Are you where you should be, could be and want to be? Or, is there some bush you need to step out from behind, some cabin door you need to throw open, some mask you need to peel away? If we remove the distractions, disguises and detours and begin to listen, we can still hear the same question God asked Adam, 'Where are you?' God never stops asking because God never stops loving. "Where are you?" is a lifetime question. This question takes a lifetime to answer.

Jesus also confronted people with the question: 'Where are you?' To this question, he added an invitation for a lifetime: "*Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). "Follow me." If you are asked this question, "Where are you?" right now, can you respond, "I'm following Jesus"? That is the only way to know where we will be throughout our faith journey. Faith is no quick, hasty, "once upon a time" decision. Faith is an eternal relationship requiring constant struggle, continual decisions and consistent obedience.

'Where are you?' This question shakes the very foundation of our lives. If we have no clear answer in mind, we need to ask trusted brothers and sisters in Christ to discuss the question with us. If our answer is not what it should be, we need to change the course. If, by God's grace, your answer is "I'm seeking to follow Jesus," stay on his path and keep asking the question every day.

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The Bible's Four Great Questions (1)

Where Are You?

Genesis 3:1-13

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Life is a journey and faith is a journey, too. While the Bible serves as GPS plotting the exact route, I would like to look to the Bible as a compass giving general direction. In his *Wishful Thinking*, Fred Buechner, a Presbyterian minister, says: "Don't start looking in the Bible for the answers it gives. Start by listening to the questions it asks." (p. 77) It is more important to ask the right questions and direction in life than to find the answers to our daily struggles.

For the next few Sundays we will learn about the Bible's 4 great questions: questions that speak to us wherever we are along the journey; and questions that insure our travel is guided by a purpose and presence greater than our own plans. This morning we begin with the first question: Where are you? The questions, "where are you," and "where are you going" are fitting questions for us today who live busy lives, but often lack direction.

This morning's text is the story of Eden, or the story of Adam and Eve. This story is not confined to a "once upon a time" story; it happens every day to everyone. The word "adam" in the Hebrew language means 'man' or 'person.' It's more of a general title than a particular name. Adam is not a certain person, but any and every person. Adam's story is our story.

I've been to the Niagara Falls several times. Whenever my friends or family visited, I took them there. I've probably been there more than 7 times. I really enjoyed watching the marvelous scene of the Niagara Falls. At night when the lights around the Falls changed their colors, it was so beautiful. I also enjoyed driving on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel in Virginia. It took about 20 minutes from the southern end of Delaware peninsular to Norfolk, Virginia. I was amazed thinking how they built this long bridge on the sea and two tunnels

under the sea. When I visited marvelous and beautiful places, I felt that my weariness and stress were washed away. But I could not stay at those places forever. I had to drive back home. We can be in the middle of paradise or in the middle of excitement, but at the same time we can be in the middle of nowhere or in the middle of meaninglessness in life. So, today's question "where are you?" can be interpreted as "Where are you finding meaning for your life"?

British preacher/psychologist Leslie Weatherhead tells of a time when he took a cruise around the world. En route he thought about what would happen if in the middle of the ocean the captain called the passengers and crew and announced: "There is plenty of food on board. Life will proceed as before. Meals will be served, games played, dances arranged and concerts provided, but I have decided not to make for a port. We shall just cruise round and round until our fuel is exhausted and then I will sink the ship." Weatherhead notes that the next few days would be the same as before. Only one thing would be different. The captain's speech would have awakened everyone in the cruise to think of the concept of purpose, meaning, direction and goal in life. Very soon afterward, first one then another passenger would jump overboard.

Our journey needs purpose and direction. Living and enjoying in the midst of paradise simply is not enough. We need to ask ourselves the question, 'Where am I?' from time to time. 'Where am I finding meaning for my life?'

The ways we pursue meaning might be varied. For some there is the temptation to get into the power game and seek meaning through self-assertion. The hunger for power does not bring greater meaning. Adam and Eve wanted to grab for power, the chance to be godlike. However, what was the outcome? They were afraid to face their beloved creator and blamed each other. There are consequences for our actions, especially our aggressive actions.

Some people try to find the meaning of life from pleasure. The problem of pursuing pleasure is that what satisfied us yesterday is not enough for today. We need more money or new sensual

experiences to keep us going. Adam and Eve wanted to get pleasure from "doing the forbidden." But the outcome of their pursuing pleasure was emptiness in their mind.

When our children were little, one couple in the congregation offered to take care of our children one evening, so Esther and I could go out for a dinner without them. They also gave us money for the dinner as well. Esther and I really enjoyed the freedom from our kids. But we soon started to worry about them, even while we were having dinner. We didn't worry about their safety, but we were concerned how they would behave, whether they would make some mistakes or do wrong during their staying with the church members. I realized that there is no such thing as absolute freedom to pursue pleasure.

When a successful business CEO had been hiking in the wilderness, he became lost. As he was almost at the point of desperation, a forest ranger found him. As the ranger approached the business man he asked, "Who are you and where are you going?" Much relieved to be found by the ranger, the CEO offered him a job at his company. Part of the ranger's new job was to ask his employer each day the question he asked in the wilderness: "Who are you and where are you going?" (Reuel Howe, *The Creative Years*, p. 17)

When God asked Adam and Eve "where are you?," God knew where Adam was physically and geographically. What God wanted Adam to ponder is 'where are you in relationship to me?' This question is what God wants every one of us to ponder. 'Where is your life in relationship to the One who gives life and gives ultimate and eternal meaning to life?'

Can you imagine God grieved when he asked Adam this question? Up until that moment, neither God nor Adam thought to ask it. Each day they would meet in the garden and talk together about what it meant to be living with God. But all that changed. Some call what happened to Adam and Eve "the fall." It was more like a stumble or a slide or a drift. At least that's how it happens to most of us. We gradually drift away until we aren't sure where we are in our relationship with God.