

Scriptures:

1 Samuel 8:4-20

Mark 3:20-35

It's Our Time

https://d29o98uiom5iak.cloudfront.net/Its%20Our%20Time_Igniter-HD.mp4

These scriptures struck me in a new way this week. Stories of faithful servants whose children were not following the ways of love the faith their parents had instilled. They struck me because I had two conversations this week of parents who shared their sadness of children who had no desire to come to church. This is a very common story isn't it. Most of the children I hear about from parents in the church are not children who have gone as far down the wrong path as Eli and Samuels sons rather they just have no interest in institutional religion. That makes sense to me because the church as an institution is still a human organization and so often gets it wrong.

Still, the harsh reality is Human nature rejects God. Last week we discussed the call of Samuel. A young man God called who was societally unworthy of his role because the sons of the priest were corrupt and not suitable to carry out the priesthood. Today we learn that later in life this faithful servant Samuel, called by God also has sons who are not fit to carry out the mission and so the Israelites beg for new leadership, they long for a different way. They call for a king.

Samuel reminds them that Kings will take everything away. Sons will be sent to war and daughters to work. He will take over your lands and your best work animals and he will rule over you until you own nothing of your own and you are like slaves. Still they ask for a king. Samuel begs them not to but he gives in. God tells Samuel to grant their request. Scripture tells us in Joshua that God allows us to "Choose this day who you will serve."

People hope that a king a ruler will right all wrongs will stop oppression will set those who have gone astray straight. We want to be strong like other nations. Insecurity calls for a king. Times have not changed much have they. From the beginning of time in our human condition we look to the outside for rescue. When we blame others for our hard life we also look for others to fix it. Just look at the state of our politics today. Just look at who the world is turning to in desperation to fix what is wrong. Dictators, celebrities, narcissists, and more are being called into leadership just to shake things up enough that maybe we will set the world straight.

If we were to have read the 'alternative' lectionary reading we would have read the following.
Genesis 3:8-15

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of

the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

“By the time our reading begins in verse eight, the serpent (who by the way is never identified as Satan in Scripture) has already deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God’s command. ..As they hunker down in the garden like children attempting to hide..., God seeks after them, fully aware that something has gone very, very wrong.

We listen as God calls out to them, “Where are you?”

This is the first question that God asks in Scripture and, as is the case with every good story, it is asked not just of the characters on the page and in the scene, but of every single one of us.

At once, the question assumes an answer—we are not where we should be—and poses yet another question—where *should* we be?

The last one hundred years have been marked by the exponential growth and sophistication of technology. The world is undoubtedly more connected than ever, but it may also be more distracted than ever. Scientists have long warned about the dangers of getting distracted by technology. When left unchecked, it can distract us from everything from our ability to have meaningful face-to-face conversations, to keeping our eyes on the road and off our screens as we drive.

So it is with our lives of faith.

In his commentary on the Book of Genesis, Walter Brueggemann suggests that the serpent in the Garden of Eden is the world’s first theologian because it is the serpent who convinces humankind to exchange obedience *to* God for theology *about* God.^[1] If we think *about* God narrowly enough, we can distract ourselves into believing that we can think our way to salvation. Our knowledge becomes a means of self-preservation and protection, rather than a means of transmitting and communicating faith in the living God.

And yet, God cuts through our thick underbrush of words and ideas, persistently calling out to us, “Where are you?”

In the same way, when moments of tension invariably arise in our communities of faith, instead of turning to prayer and patient discernment, we get distracted by arguments and anxieties and self-interests, and so we take our ball and go home. We cut ourselves off from community and, in turn, we short-circuit the possibility of reconciliation.

God's voice calls out after us as we stomp away, "Where are you?"

In order for us to consider this question, we must discern deeply as to where we are in relation to where God is inviting us."¹

What distracts us from living lives of faithfulness? Distractions may look different for different folks, but their central characteristic is the same: they draw our attention away from focusing on the life-giving parts of our lives.

We can become distracted from our relationships with friends and family, and even from our romantic partners. Work that once brought much joy to our lives can become occluded by the desire for position and power, influence and wealth. Even our days of rest and vacation can become muddled with concerns about what we might be missing at work or in the world. All these things distract us from the places in our lives that afford us peace and joy and love, and ultimately, they distract us from our life before God.

But we as individuals aren't the only ones who can become distracted; our churches and communities of faith can get distracted, too. One way that churches become distracted is by focusing on innovation rather than faithfulness. When churches focus on innovation, they define themselves by their programs and ministries, rather than by their witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. They focus on the building rather than the builder.

Another way that churches can become distracted is by focusing on entertainment rather than transformation. When churches focus on entertainment, it is almost as if they exist in a vacuum. Walk in the doors, and it is as if you've entered another dimension, completely cut off from the cares and concerns of the real world. Here, the sky is always blue, the water is always calm, and the boat is never rocked. Sermons are as soft and as sweet as cream puffs, offering more self-help than Gospel. When churches fall into the trap of offering individual members a custom-ordered faith—sanding off every jagged edge and smoothing out every rough place—they possess about as much transformative power as the society club at prayer.

The possibilities for getting distracted in our lives, and particularly our lives of faith, are many. But the Good News is that ours is a God who, no matter where we wander or try and hide, relentlessly pursues us, calling out after us, "Where are you?" and inviting us back to Godself. May we listen intently enough to hear God's voice and discern deeply enough to answer God's call.

Amen

¹ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2018/05/07/where-are-you-pentecost-3b-june-10-2018/>
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