

HIDING NOT SO WELL

The Adam and Eve tale is one of the oldest that we have in the Bible. We know it dates back at least three thousand years, which is roughly when it assumes its present written form. It's hard to know how much farther back it goes before that as an oral tradition.

This is not some simple little story. It is a two-chapter mini-saga of sorts, with a number of sub-plots that, over the passage of time, are interwoven together to give the impression that it has always been one, long continuous narrative. That is probably not the case.

Among the distinct vignettes is the curious one read this morning concerning what we might call "the hiding."

As evening approaches, God walks through the pleasantly breezy garden. Apparently, God has legs and feet--the characterization of Deity in such human form itself underscoring the antiquity of the story. As God strolls along, there is a certain amount of disturbance created in the grass and bushes. Adam and Eve hear the rustling noise, and they promptly hide themselves.

They, it is reported, are afraid to be seen by God. That's funny. Naked or not, there's nothing there that God hasn't already seen a hundred, a thousand, a million times before, and yet, there behind the trees, they try to conceal it, camouflage it, distract attention from it. But this is God we're talking about--you know, the all-seeing and all-knowing One. If ever there is a futile pursuit, surely it's in the trying to hide from God. (God must get such a kick out of us!)

This motif of the hiding is a universal one. If you're a human being, then you have those moments, maybe lots of them, where you want to cover up completely so that no one can see who you really are, so that you can go on pretending that you are someone whom you aren't.

Haven't you ever had one of those dreams?

You know, you stand up to do your sermon, and you discover that you aren't wearing any clothes. Oh, I guess that's just mine. How about this, then? You're at school or in the shopping center or at a family gathering, someplace where there's lots of people, and you look down and discover that, there you are, standing in your underwear--or much less!

Oh, the stress, the embarrassment, the strenuous efforts that we go through to find something with which to clothe ourselves, anything behind which to hide ourselves, like Adam and Eve in the trees. Needless to say, these dreams are very unpleasant.

Apparently, at our most basic level--which is what that old Genesis story portrays for us--the most frightening thing in the world is the prospect of being exposed, of being seen as we really are, of being perceived as we truly are. Because of that, ordinarily we work very hard at keeping ourselves as well-hidden as possible. We are of the firm opinion that, if people knew us in our totality, they would not like us, and they would never accept us. As mistaken as that opinion might be, it is still enough to drive the multi-million dollar industries of fashion and cosmetics, to say nothing of plastic surgery.

One of the things that I find interesting about these naked-as-a-jaybird dreams is that, while the dreamer is understandably horrified and chagrined by his or her nakedness, almost always all the others who figure in the dream are neither shocked nor impressed by what they see, assuming that they are paying attention to it at all

(and often they aren't).

The meaning of such dreams, then, is simple: "Nakedness," in the symbolical sense, is a problem only for the human ego (i.e., the dreamer in the dream), which, like Adam and Eve, naively thinks that, just because it has concealed itself, so to speak, in the brush, it is well hidden. In their own way, such dreams peel the branches and leaves away from us, in the interest of exposing us at least to ourselves. That sort of "nakedness" usually represents the possibility of a step forward in our development--of moving away from our hypocrisy¹, of becoming more real.

When one stretches from the old Genesis tale, in the 20th Century B.C.E., to the gospel of Mark, in the 1st Century C.E., one finds that this hiding theme still prevails. One also finds that it is important enough to warrant comment from Jesus himself, who gives absolutely no quarter to it. "For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed," he is cited as saying, "nor is anything secret, except to come to light" (4.22).² In short, the universe is purposed to push out into the light whatever we attempt to sequester in the darkness.

That's not a particularly comforting thought, especially when, in hearing it, our minds go instantly to the list of the three most heinous things that we ever did over our years, things that we have never told another living soul about, and never intend to. The chance of any of that being unveiled and released to public scrutiny is enough to send us into a panic attack.

But not so fast. Breathe. It happens that the placement of Jesus' saying is most telling. It should be observed (see for yourself!) that it follows on the heels of the warning against hiding one's light under the basket, or under the bed, instead of prominently putting it on the lamp stand. In other words, per the ordering of these two sayings in Mark, that-which-is-hidden-that-will-be-disclosed is not our darkest deed--there is, thank God, forgiveness for that. Instead, that-which-is-hidden-that-will-be-disclosed is our brightest potential--from which, for some strange reason, we desire to distance ourselves.

Now, there's a twist that we didn't expect at all! The suggestion is that what concerns Jesus--namely, that which is kept a secret, that which is intentionally pulled away from the world's sight--is our light. The problem is that light, by its very nature, presses to be revealed.

Looking through that Adam-and-Eve lens, it is the irony of all ironies that what we are tempted to keep carefully under wraps, exclusively beyond the sight of others, is not just our worst (we could understand that), but also our best (that's harder to get our heads around).

We worry, it seems, that our God-given uniqueness and genius will sour our relationships and undermine our ability to belong in an "average" world (and who doesn't covet being just average--what could possibly be expected from the "just average"?). We appear to be anxious that, if we are too good, we will appear odd and ill-fitting (and I suppose we might). People, we figure, will not find us agreeable if we are like that, and so we hide--though not so well, either. Remember, this is God we're talking about--you know, the all-seeing and all knowing One.

"The hiding" is an abiding human fact, and so, truly, the haunting question remains: Why would persons ever wish to keep their best under wraps and unexpressed?

Speaking only for yourself, why would you?
What is the favorite excuse for it that you use?

¹ *From the Greek “hupokritai,” meaning “they who pretend.”*

² *Compare to a similar saying in Matthew (10.26-27; paralleled in Luke 12.2-3): “. . . For nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”*