

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
Sunday, September 18, 2022
Scripture: Luke 15: 11-32

Sermon: Hide and Seek

A pastor phoned the home of a recent visitor to his church, and a voice on the other end of the phone answered with a whispered "Hello." The pastor said, "Who is this?" The whisperer said, "Jimmy." The pastor said, "How old are you Jimmy?" "Four," answered Jimmy. "Well, Jimmy, can I please speak to your mom or dad?" asked the pastor. "They are busy," replied Jimmy. "Well," said the pastor, "are there any other adults in your home?" "The police," said Jimmy, "but they are all busy too." The pastor was getting worried now and asked, "Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?" Jimmy quickly responded, still whispering, "They're busy looking for me."

Like Jimmy, a lot of people in life are hiding. They are hiding from the police, hiding from friends and spouses, hiding from parents, hiding from God. How can we hide from God when God is everywhere and knows everything about us? What could possibly motivate us to want to hide from God?

I think one of the key reasons we hide from God is because we know we've done something wrong. Usually when we've done something wrong we want to run and hide and not face what we have done. Sin sends us into hiding.

In Genesis 3:8-10 we read, "*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, 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?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.'*"

Though Adam and Eve had enjoyed perfect union with their loving Creator, sin left them naked and ashamed. (Genesis 3:8-13)

From the very beginning we rebel against God's authority. God asked Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of one special tree, but they did

it anyway. And then, they were embarrassed. Their sinful action separated them from their Creator.

Thankfully, God faithfully pursues us, lovingly calling, “Where are you?” God wants us to see that we are sinful and lost and we need him to save us.

Today, we are looking at the familiar passage of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Last Sunday we looked at the first two parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin. Today it is the lost son. This is the son who wants to run away from home and asks his father for his inheritance so he can live out on his own. The son thinks life beyond home will be better. The son thinks money will keep him happy and life will be easy. The son is running from work, from responsibility and running away from a father who loves him.

The word prodigal means, “spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.” Being a prodigal son is not a good thing. These three parables are stories of how we are lost and hiding from God. The son has run away from his loving father to seek after the world. But soon the son spends all his resources living extravagantly and suddenly realizes he has nothing left.

He begins to face adversity and the true difficulties of life. He had been living in a dream world hiding from reality and now he has to deal with hunger and being homeless.

A pastor by the name of Alan Kraft once said, “Sin is the deeply rooted tendency in all of us to live with self as the center of our lives rather than God. We have a desire to be the center of the universe. want to be noticed, affirmed, valued, worshiped, in control, to be comfortable, to be successful. These are not just casual interests—very often they drive our lives.”

This is what the Prodigal Son was now facing. The sin in his life caused him to think only of himself, his own pleasures and what he thought was freedom from his father. He was in hiding.

Jesus Christ meets us right here in our pride and self-centeredness. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:15 “*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.*”

The more we understand God's holiness, the more we see our sin. And an awareness of our sin opens our eyes more fully to God's mercy and grace.

We are all like the Prodigal Son. There are times that we run away and hide from God. We don't want to deal with the responsibilities of life or the adversities of life. We want life to be happy, fun and comfortable. We don't want life to be heavy with the burdens and problems of this world.

When life gets difficult how do we handle the problems and the traumas and adversities of life? Something happens to us amid adversity. Did you ever think that adversity can lead us to growth and growth in life cannot be achieved without adversity? For some people, though, adversity does not automatically bring growth, and some are crippled by it and turn to worldly pleasures to avoid it.

The outcome to adversity depends on how we respond to adversity in our lives. If we hide and isolate ourselves we become more vulnerable to Satan's lies, and that keeps us in bondage to the very things we long to be free of.

The Apostle Paul believed that we all need to come out of hiding, face God and our situations and be filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God. In Romans 5:2-5 he says, *"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*

The Prodigal Son finally came to his senses and realized he wanted to go home to his father and confess his sins. He no longer wanted to run away from his father, and he no longer wanted to hide. The son was ready to come face-to-face with his father whom he knew loved him greatly.

I love this part of the story when the son returns home. The scripture lesson says, "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he **RAN** to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son

said to him, *'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'*"

Did you hear what I said about the father? "When the son was still a long way off the father ran toward his son," showing reconciliation and forgiveness. The father was always praying and hoping his son would come back home. He always had hope in his heart for his son's return. The father ran to his son filled with love and compassion. He wasn't angry at his son. He forgave him. Love and compassion was all he had to welcome him home. The father called all his friends to celebrate with him. The son who had been lost and hiding from life was now found.

It is the same with us. Our Heavenly Father wants us to come to him. He is standing there waiting for us to realize that life without him is difficult. Life without God is boring.

God knows when we are hiding, and he calls to us, and he runs to us when we return home to be with him. God wants us to be a part of the family. We can run but we can't hide! God always knows our needs and knows when we sin and when we are lost and away from him.

We all have rebelled against God. We have run away from God, but God still loves us just like the father loved his son. He wants us back, and he is willing to go to any length to get us back.

Jesus wants us to learn how to grow in him in the midst of the difficulties we face. When we are tempted to run away again and go back into hiding, he reminds us that he is our true hiding place and in him is the safest place to be.

If we obey the Lord and seek His wisdom in life for our decisions, it is then that we will be at peace in the midst of change and calm in the midst of a storm.

Psalm 32:7-11 says, *"For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.'*" Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So, rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!"

First of all, we need to recognize our spiritual need, that we've been separated from God, that we're lost and need to be found, that we're dead and we need God to change our life. That's the language that's used by the father at the end of the story. "My son was lost, but now he's found; he was dead, but now he's alive!"

The son was repenting of his past and wanted to start again. No more running and no more hiding. We also need to recognize that, and like the prodigal, we have to come to ourselves, come to a realization of our need to be forgiven and made new creations, learning from our past experiences and growing in our relationship with the Father. Secondly, it means to acknowledge our wrongdoing, to confess our sins; and thirdly, it means to humbly return to the Father; to abandon trying to fill the void in our heart with the sin of the world, and to seek a place in the Father's house. You actually have to turn; you have to leave the old life and begin to live in a new way in the fellowship of the Father.

St. Augustine once wrote, "***Jesus is the shout of God, the way God runs out to meet us.***"

Brothers and sisters, that's the gospel. God runs to welcome us home, and the way he ran to meet us is through Jesus, by sending Jesus to be incarnate among us, to live a perfect and obedient life, to live the life that we should have lived but didn't, and then to die for our sins on the cross, and then to be raised from the dead. He's there welcoming us, he's there ready with open arms to receive us and to embrace us. It's the heart of the gospel as you see his running to meet each one of us and to rescue us in our need.

I want to end by reading something to you from the author Max Lucado. He tells this story in his book **No Wonder They Call Him the Savior.** It's beautifully told; I'm just going to read it to you.

"Longing to leave her poor Brazilian neighborhood, Cristina wanted to see the world. Discontent with the home having only a pallet on the floor, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove, she dreamed of a better life in the city. One morning she slipped away, breaking her mother's heart.

"Knowing what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, Maria (the mother) hurriedly packed to go find her. On her way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing:

pictures. She sat in a photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself.

“With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew Cristina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. But when pride meets hunger, humans will do things that before were unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search.

“Bars, hotels, night clubs, any place with a reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to the mall, and at each place she left her picture, taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. On the back of each photo, she wrote a note.

“It wasn’t too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village.

“It was a few weeks later that young Cristina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken; her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet, yet the little village was in too many ways too far away.

“As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Cristina’s eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation: ‘Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn’t matter. Please come home.’ And she did.”

Wherever we are, whatever we have done, whatever we have become, it doesn’t matter. All we have to do is to come home to the Father. He is waiting with open arms.