

RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD  
You Can Run, But You Can't Hide  
Genesis 3:1-10

Mitch Albom, in his latest book *have a little faith*, reflected in his first chapter entitled "The Great Tradition of Running Away" that "Adam hid in the Garden of Eden. Moses tried to substitute his brother. Jonah jumped a boat and was swallowed by a whale.

"Man [sic] likes to run from God. It's a tradition. So perhaps I was only following tradition when, as soon as I could walk, I started running from Albert Lewis. He was not God, of course, but in my eyes, he was the next closest thing, a holy man, a man of the cloth, the big boss, the head rabbi. My parents joined his congregation when I was an infant. I sat on my mother's lap as he delivered his sermons.

"And yet, once I realized who he was—a Man of God—I ran. If I saw him coming down the hallway, I ran. If I had to pass his study, I ran. Even as a teenager, if I spotted him approaching, I ducked down a corridor. He was tall, six foot one, and I felt tiny in his presence. When he looked down through his black-rimmed glasses, I was certain he could view all my sins and shortcomings.

Albom concluded "So I ran. I ran until he couldn't see me anymore." (Albom, Mitch. *have a little faith*. New York: Hyperion. 2009. pg. 6.)

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Some friends of mine in the church gave me this book to read before Christmas, and though I was so busy during the holidays that I haven't finished it yet, this little autobiographical paragraph continues to dance around in my imagination.

The Great Tradition of Running Away from God.

For the next four weeks we're going to explore scriptures that tell of our faith's greatest runaways—those people who tried to elude the attention of the Almighty—only to find that while they could run, they couldn't hide.

I. We heard about the first great runaways in our scripture this morning. One comedian remarked that years after the events of our scripture took place, Adam and his sons Cain and Abel were out on a walk one day and came to the beautiful Garden of Eden. Just to pass by was an experience. Adam knew what was inside those beautiful gates—the lush fruits, the gorgeous flowers—it was a place of endless delight.

An angel with a flaming sword was guarding the gate. Adam said, “Boys, take a good look. That’s were we lived before your mother ate us out of house and home.”

Now I don’t know about you, but the story I heard read earlier in the service doesn’t just mention Eve as the eater of the forbidden fruit. Adam was right there with her.

In fact, they both hid themselves when they heard God come walking through the Garden on that day. They knew they had done wrong. They knew they had disobeyed the ONLY rule God had laid down. And so they ran away. They tried to hide.

I thought about this scripture at the service of celebration for Dawn Kilpatrick’s life on Friday, when the Rev. Ed Michael related a story that Kevin Kilpatrick shared about a very early memory of his mother. Kevin was about 4 years old and was playing in his house with his next door neighbor when they got into some mischief. Dawn discovered her son’s misdeed, and went to find him, calling, “Kevin Kilpatrick, come here this minute.”

Kevin and his little friend decided to make the moment a game of hide and seek, and he ran around the house with his mother chasing after him. They two little ones ended up in Kevin’s room and slid under the bed to hide. When Dawn bent down on one side of the bed, the two rolled to the other. When Dawn moved to the other side, the two rolled back, giggling the whole time.

Finally, Dawn got a hold of one of them, and that’s when they realized that this was not a laughing matter for her.

When it comes to persistent parents--you can run, but you can't hide.

Adam and Eve tried the same thing when they turned away from the will of God. The scripture tells us that when they heard their Creator coming, they took off running. They ran from their guilt. They hid from their shame. They covered their vulnerability with an apron of fig leaves.

When it comes to persistent parents—especially the Divine Parent—we can run, but we can't hide.

From what were they running? The text tells us that they had an epiphany of sorts after they ate the apple. They realized they were naked—and they were ashamed of their bodily nakedness—and so they ran before God could see them.

Now most of us can relate to this. We cover up, especially in winter, our nakedness. Most of us wouldn't think of posing in the nude—perhaps because we're ashamed; perhaps out of modesty.

You know the old joke that is based on this morning's scripture: A minister went to visit one of his congregants. He knocked on the door several times, but no one answered. He knew someone was home because the television was on, so he took one of his cards, wrote "Revelation 3:20" on it and stuck it in the door. (Rev. 3:20 says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone will open, I will come in.") The following Sunday, the female congregant came up to him and handed him a card with her name and the following message: Genesis 3:10, which we heard this morning, "I heard their voice and I was naked, so I hid myself." ([A Minister, A Priest and a Rabbi](#). 2000. pg. 157).

But scriptural nakedness means more than just bodily nudity. It meant for Adam and Eve that they realized their vulnerability to sin, to guilt, to shame. They ran because they didn't want to be caught. They didn't want to face their wrongdoing. They didn't want to face their total dependence upon God, and they feared his wrath. Fear of God was something new to them—and they didn't want to face it.

How we try to do the same thing. If we made a list of those things considered God's laws, not a single one of them would be unbroken by those of us gathered in this room today. We are all imperfect. We've all made mistakes. We've sinned by commission and by omission.

There's not a person in this room today who hasn't done something we knew we shouldn't. There's not a person in this room who has not turned away from God's will in some form or fashion. There's not a person in this room who has not, at one time in their life or another, run away from responsibility or hid from having to confess.

And we try to hide in a variety of places.

Some of us hide behind a mask of perfectionism—like Bree Van de Camp Hodge of *Desperate Housewives* fame, we plaster a smile on an unblemished façade and meet the world with nary crack in our etiquette.

Some of us hide behind people of power, letting others voice the words that we wish we could say, but don't want to take a hit if they're not popularly received, like many of the powerbrokers behind the scenes in Washington.

Some of us hide in plain sight, doing whatever the crowd does so we don't stand out, aren't seen as different.

Some of us literally hide in our homes, allowing our phobias to trap us and control us.

Oh there are so many places, so many ways to hide. And a very few of us are successful enough to hide our vulnerabilities from others.

But with God, we can run, but we can't hide. God finds us, and invites us to confess, and then God forgives.

As was discussed at the Stalcup lecture series yesterday, forgiveness doesn't mean we don't face the consequences. But forgiveness liberates us to move forward, to bring about justice and reconciliation.

We didn't read this part of Genesis 3, but if you have your Bibles open to verses 14-21, after God spells out the consequences of their actions to Adam and Eve, the Divine Parent does not break off relationship. Listen to what happens in verse 21. "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them."

God did not send them off defenseless. God still cared for them, provided for them, loved them.

That's the good news for today. We can run, but we can't hide. God will find us no matter where we happen to be. God will give us the courage to confess, and will care for us no matter what.

One of my favorite Presbyterian writers is Anne LaMott, whom I've quoted from before. Anne was a runner. In her book Traveling Mercies she tells of the time during her college years when she was trying to discover who she was to become as an adult. Throughout high school she was a good student and an accomplished tennis player. She did both because it was expected by her parents. She writes, "I was doing well academically and I was a well-ranked tennis player and was the apple of my handsome father's eye—and then I would bring home a report card with a B+ on it, and my parents would look at the report card as if I'd flunked....It never once occurred to me to stare back at them and say, 'What a crock.' I just felt shame that I had disappointed them again..."

So she began to run. She writes, "Drugs helped. More than anything else, they gave me the feeling that I was fine and life was good and something sacred shimmered at its edges. Being sexual with boys helped too. Being sexual with anyone helped."

And, she finally hid in the philosophical world of atheism. She became an anti-Christian in reaction to some of the more simplified judgmentalism of her teachers and peers. She memorized Bertrand Russell's essay, "Why I Am Not a Christian."

In the spring of her sophomore year, however, she took a course with a tiny Czechoslovakian woman named Eva Gossman. She loved Eva Gossman. One day, the professor assigned the class Kierkegaard's classic book, Fear and Trembling, which retold the story of Abraham, who heard God's angel tell him to take his darling boy Isaac up to the mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. "Now this was exactly the sort of Old Testament behavior (she) had trouble with. But the way Kierkegaard wrote it, Abraham understood that all he really had in life was God's unimaginable goodness and love, God's promise of protection, God's paradoxical promise that Isaac would provide him with many descendants. He understood that without God's love and company, this life would be so empty and barbaric that it almost wouldn't matter whether his son was alive or not."

It was in the reading of that text, of understanding Abraham's great faith, that God found where Anne's true soul was hidden. She writes, "In the interior silence that followed by understanding of this scene, I held my breath for as long as I could, sitting there under the fluorescent lights—and then I crossed over. I don't know how else to put it or how and why I actively made, if not exactly a leap of faith, a lurch of faith. I left class believing—accepting—that there was a God."

But still she ran. Still she hid. She didn't want the trappings of God, especially not as it was presented by Christianity.

For 10 years she kept avoiding her relationship with her Creator. She moved into a houseboat in Marin County, where she would shop on Sunday mornings at an ethnic flea market. Across from the market she would hear gospel music coming from a church. "It was called St. Andrew Presbyterian, and it looked homely and impoverished, a ramshackle building with a cross on top...But the music wafting out was so pretty that I would stop and listen."

Soon she was visiting the church. She loved singing about Jesus, but she just didn't want to be preached at about him. To her, Jesus made about as much sense as Scientology or dowsing.

It was the singing—the music. She wrote, “Something inside me that was stiff and rotting would feel soft and tender. Somehow the singing wore down all the boundaries and distinctions that kept me so isolated.”

But then she got pregnant, and for whatever reason she made the decision that she couldn't keep the baby. She got an abortion, and then she ran again. She ran as far away from the church as she could. She hid at home, smoking dope and getting drunk. One night, she almost died from loss of blood and overdosing from substances.

And as she lay in her bed, she became aware of someone with her, hunkered down in the corner. After a while, in the dark, she knew beyond a doubt that it was Jesus. She writes that felt him surely as she felt her dog lying next to her. “I felt him just sitting there on his haunches in the corner of my sleeping loft, watching me with patience and love, and I squinched my eyes shut, but that didn't help because that's not what I was seeing him with....”

She continues, “One week later, when I went back to church, I was so hung-over that I couldn't stand up for the songs, and this time I stayed for the sermon. The last song was so deep and raw and pure that I could not escape. It was as if the people were singing in between the notes...I began to cry and left before the benediction, and I ran home....under a sky as blue as one of God's own dreams. And I opened the door to my houseboat, took a long deep breath and said out loud, “All right, “You can come in.” (LaMott, Anne. Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith. Pantheon Press. 1999. pp. ).

Christ had run after her, and had found her.

Christ runs after us, and finds us.

We can run, but we can't hide. There's no better news than that, brothers and sisters.