

Trinity United Methodist Church

February 2, 2020

“Hide or Seek?”

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Scripture: Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Sermon

Would you pray with me? Oh Lord, open our ears and our hearts. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do, that we might become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

So I would be willing to bet, if I were a betting man—and pfft, if I had money—that all of us at some point in our lives have played the game Hide and Seek. Haven't we? Whether as children, or whether more recently with items that you said, “Hmm, I need to put this in a safe place,” and you hid it in such a safe place in your home that you have forgotten where it is, and it's really safe now. So my question for you today is, when playing hide and seek—this is not a rhetorical question, this can be answered—which is more fun, to hide or to seek? (*Congregation answers “to hide.”*) To hide! Awesome!

Yeah, to hide is much more fun than to be the one that's stuck seeking, right? And it's even more fun when you can get creative with your hiding place. Sometimes we're able to hide in plain sight and kind of play tricks on people like that. Sometimes I've been in hiding places that were so good that I could have curled up and taken a nap in my hiding spot and waited to be found. Indeed, to hide.

In our youth group here at Trinity and in youth groups across churches of all stripes, they play a variation on Hide and Seek that's called Sardines. Y'all know how to play Sardines? Everybody goes out at once and one person is the hider, so they find the hiding spot. They don't tell others where the hiding spot is, because the others then have to find the hider. But when they find the hider, they don't go, “hey, I found you!” and go to the next round. No, they join the hider in the hiding spot.

The youth aren't supposed to go into the chair room. But say the hider goes in the chair room. So then the next person finds the hider and goes in the chair room as well. (We keep the door open, right?) Say it's a small hiding spot, like under my desk in the office or something like that. So if it's like 15 kids playing, then you all get crammed under there like a bunch of...*sardines*. And then the last person who doesn't find the group becomes the hider the next go-round, typically. So Sardines can be a fun variation of Hide and Seek.

But the thing is, we continue to play Hide and Seek, albeit in different ways, as we grow into adulthood. There are many different ways in which we try to hide. Maybe something about ourselves that we don't want others to know. Maybe something that we've done in our past. Maybe thoughts that we have in our mind. Whatever the case might be, there are ways that we try to hide as adults.

And a lot of times, when we try to hide as adults, we end up playing Sardines as well, as adults. Because others might stumble upon what we're trying to hide. They might say, "hey, you're looking down lately. Is something going on?" Or they might call you out on a certain behavior or comment you made or something like that, and we typically then try to stuff it. Or, in cases of things like addiction, we manipulate people from our hiding places and we try to make them codependent with us; "Shh, don't tell anybody about this. Don't blow up my spot," right? So that we can continue on with whatever it is that we're trying to hide. We pull people into the darkness of the hiding.

But as we focus on this theme verse as a church for the year, we play Sardines as a church as well. Most of the time we stay hidden within the walls of our church, right? And what do we do? We wait for others to find us. And so when visitors come, when others stumble upon us and come into the fortress, the castle walls of the church, we say, "Yay, you're here! Come, be a part of us!" And we pull them in, right? And then what do we do? We hide until the next person stumbles upon us. "Yay, you're here! Come join us!" And then we hide. And the cycle continues. And it's not just this church. It's churches of all stripes. That is an easy pattern to fall into. It's easy because it's our default nature as human beings.

As human beings we have been hiding since the very beginning of time. The Bible tells us that God created Adam and Eve, placed them in the garden, and everything was perfect. They fellowshiped with God, they talked with God face to face, and they weren't afraid of anything. They weren't ashamed of anything. There was no reason to hide. And God would walk with them, especially in the cool of the evening. But then when sin entered the picture and their eyes were opened, they became like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. They said, "uh-oh. We're naked," and they became ashamed. And when God came through that evening, He called out for

them and they popped out of their hiding place. And He said, “Why would you try to hide from me?” And they said, “because we were ashamed.”

Shame is a really powerful emotion that drives us deeper into our hiding places. You fast-forward the pages of the Old Testament a little bit, the book of Judges, we hear about Gideon, who was hiding from the Israelites’ enemies, the Midianites, in the wine press. He was hiding from the enemies, but then as God called him out of that hole to go and lead the army against their enemy, he then began to hide from his calling from God, giving all kinds of excuses of why he couldn’t come out of his hiding place.

You fast-forward to the New Testament, in the book of John, and we read about the woman that Jesus encountered at the well. You might say, “well, wait a minute. She was out in the open. She wasn’t hiding.” But she was, because women in those days would come out to the well to draw water in the coolest parts of the day, either very early in the morning before it got too hot, or later in the evening as it started to cool down. And if you read the text carefully, it says that she came out around noon, right smack in the middle of the hottest part of the day, because she knew that no one else would be around to see her in her shame. She was hiding, as well.

In our Scripture theme verse for 2020, the context in which we find it, Jesus is talking about worry. Back in verse 25, He began saying, “Therefore, don’t worry about what you’re going to drink, or eat, or wear. Consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Doesn’t God clothe them? He’s going to do the same thing for you.” He says the pagans, everybody else, worries. Don’t be like them. But you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and everything else that you worry about is going to fall into place. (That’s the Dan Elmore paraphrase.)

But think of how much we worry, even still, and how that drives us deeper into our hiding places. At a minimum, we wait for God to come to us in our hiding spots. At a minimum, we wait for God to find us. We don’t necessarily go actively seeking after God. But at worst, might it be that we’re actually hiding something in shame? We might not even be sure what it is that we’re hiding. Some of us have past relationships that have so screwed us up that we suppress whatever it is, but we know that we still carry around this sense of shame that makes us hide.

Our dog before the one that we currently have, his name was Buddy. Buddy was a black lab mix, a big dog. One day Bekah came home and went looking for Buddy, couldn’t find him, and she heard some rustling in the corner of the living room behind my recliner. She coaxed Buddy out and the dog had pulled the cereal box off the kitchen counter, had eaten all the cereal inside but went for those last few bites and had gotten his head stuck in the cereal box and it was still on his head. He was pawing at it, trying to figure out how to get it off. And you could just *feel* the dog was ashamed that 1)

he was caught, and secondly, he couldn't figure out how to get the stupid cereal box off his head.

And that's us as well. Too often we're stuck in the cereal box, and we're ashamed and we hide. But friends, it's not what God intends for us. God didn't create Adam and Eve to hide from Him, but to talk with Him face to face. God created us in His image, and throughout Scripture we see that God is a seeking God. God is always seeking us out. The parables in Luke chapter 15 of the lost coin. The coin is gone, hidden somewhere, you might say. And the woman in the house doesn't just blow it off; "Well, I've got these nine others." She seeks after it; she tears her house from top to bottom until she finds it. The shepherd that loses the one sheep; you know, sheep are famous for wandering off and getting into some tough hiding spots. The shepherd doesn't say, "Well, at least I have these other 99 sheep." The shepherd goes and *seeks after* that one lost, hidden sheep.

And when Jesus tells us to seek, He is telling us to be like God, as we are created in his image to be. Everywhere in the New Testament that the root Greek word that is translated "seek" here, it's also translated as "look," as "want," as "desire," as in to want or desire something. One of my favorite verses from the Old Testament is Isaiah chapter 55, verse 6. It says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near." And so often we tell ourselves these lies, especially if we're deep in our shame, that, "No, I've got to get myself together before I can try to seek God, much less be sought *by* God. I've got to get myself straight before I can pray to God, otherwise God's not going to listen to me." But Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. *Call* on Him while He is near. Let the wicked *forsake* their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them *turn* to the Lord, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

And you might be sitting there thinking, "Well, I get what you're laying down, but I don't really think I'm hiding all that much. I'm certainly not hiding any big unconfessed sin." Well, friends, you're not off the hook, either. Because Paul says in Colossians, "Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, *keep seeking* the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." We don't get to just sing *Amazing Grace*, *how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found...* We don't get to sing that and experience that and then just surf or coast through the rest of our lives spiritually. We're called to ever and ever higher purposes to *keep seeking, looking, wanting, desiring* the things above, where Christ is.

And when we do, Jeremiah 29, another favorite verse of mine, says, "You will seek me and find me, when you *seek me with all your heart*." We have to be *all in* on this. Because after all, in Matthew chapter 7, after the teaching of *Seek first the kingdom*, Jesus goes on into the second verse of that song that we just sang. (He didn't

write the song; somebody took the words and put them into the song, but it's the same words.) *Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.* "For everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

Unless you're sitting there thinking, "Come on, really. Not even me, right? This just isn't for me." Jesus continues and says, "Which of you, if your child asks for bread, will give them a stone? Or if they ask for a fish, will give them a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your own children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who seek Him?" Because if we believe in faith in Jesus Christ, we, too, are God's own kids. And God loves to give us good things.

I saw this thing on Facebook a while back and I searched and searched and searched for it but cannot find it. So if you know what it is—if *you* shared it at some point—send it to me, all right? It said something like, the Gospel is going from when we screw up and we think to ourselves, "Ugh, I've got to hide this from Mom and Dad." The Gospel is when we say, "Ah. I *get* to go to Mom and Dad because they'll help with this." That's what God wants us to do, to always come to Him and seek Him out.

And so in our theme verse for 2020, as we live in this together, we're going to break down what is the kingdom, what is righteousness, what are "all these things?" Is God like a Santa Claus who just gives us whatever we ask for? (Hint: No.) But as we consider what it is to seek, let's do it. No more hiding, no more just passive waiting. Let's **seek**. Let's be on the lookout for signs of the kingdom. If we look close enough, we'll see them. Let's *want* and *desire* more of God and His righteousness in our lives this year in all we do as individuals, as families, and as the church.

Thanks be to God. Amen.