

Breaking the Silence
Genesis 3:1-13; 21

Rev. Willetta "Lettie" Ar-Rahmaan

^{NRSV} **Genesis 3:1** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." ¹³ 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." ²¹ And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Breaking the Silence

Every morning there is a silence in the land. The silence of darkness is broken by a ray of sunlight, a downpour of rain or a chirping bird in the early morning hours. Each and every day we wake up to a sound that breaks the night darkness, but there is still a silence in the land, a silence which many of us have contributed to in one way or another during our lifetime. Many of us have contributed to the silence of poverty, emotional and physical abuse, and harassment. Many of us have contributed to the silence of war in Rwanda, Iraq, Grenada, Cuba and Haiti. We have contributed to Apartheid in South Africa, modern day slavery, segregation, drug trafficking and gang violence in our communities. We have contributed to the re-segregation of the school system, the segregation of congressional district lines, segregation of the school board and elected officials. Many of us have contributed to the silence of oppression, racism, ageism, teenage pregnancy, AIDS and rise of our black men in prison. Maybe we as the church have contributed to the silence of the brothers on the DL, sexual orientation and brothers and sisters avoiding the church. Many of us contributed to the silence in our homes with our parents, children, spouses, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and other relatives. Maybe we have contributed to the silence in the congregation, congregant and minister, congregant and congregant, minister and minister. Maybe we have contributed to the silence on our jobs with policy and behavior that are not conducive to the Christian way of life. In one way or another we have contributed to the silence in the land.

Therefore, when we contribute to the silence, we find ourselves immune to the silence in the land. As God's people we ought not to be immune to the silence. We

ought to initiate dialogue on situations and circumstances which cause the body of Christ to decay and be unfruitful. Even in the Garden of Eden there was silence, but before there was silence we see in the 2nd chapter of Genesis where Adam and Eve communicated openly and freely with God. As chapter 3 opened, we find another dialogue not with God but with the snake and Eve and midway through Adam and Eve went from communicating with God to dead silence. A Silence they never experienced before. Adam and Eve were like most of us, gullible to snakeology. According to Dr. John W. Kinney, my Systematic Theology Professor at STVU, snakeology is knowing God's truth but allowing a twisted and distorted view of God's word to cause doubt. Therefore, Adam and Eve were fascinated, manipulated and outwitted by the snake. The presentation of what was forbidden was made attractive. It was this type of deceptive attractiveness to the fruit that caused both to desire and to eat.

Let us listen to v4-6 "But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate." This is where we pickup the story. They tried to live a life that was beyond their capacity. As they tried to live beyond their capacity, Adam and Eve came to the realization of their disobedience. Verse7 states, "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves." Once they knew of their nakedness they tried to cover their mistake. They were naked and ashamed because they were exposed in the garden. In

reality they had been naked long before they realized, it but could not see their nakedness due to their intimate relationship with God. It is this kind of relationship with God that keeps us sheltered and surrounds us with God's hedge of protection. This protection keeps us focused on the things of God and what God have given us. Therefore, when Adam and Eve took their focus off God and ate of the fruit, they realized they were naked and ashamed that they were exposed to the reality of life without the presence of God. They were exposed to broken communication and relationship. In their exposed state they tried to hide from God. Even in our exposed state, many of us continue to remain naked and ashamed. It is in this hiding state that God interacts with humanity to deliver us and restore relationships. So, what happens when God breaks the silence?

First, God initiates disclosure. As we notice all communication with God and humanity ceased after they ate of the tree of good and evil because they came to the realization of their action. Their actions cause them to see their sinful presence, guilt and shame in which they chose to hide from the presence of God. It is in v9 of this text that God calls out to the man. God asks, "Where are you?" God initiates disclosure in order for man to come from hiding and be in the presence of God. The man answers God in v10, He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Adam's response began the two-way dialogue. Many of us are sitting here today hearing the presence of God walking in our lives and saying, where are you? God is asking each of us where are you on the issue of poverty, where are you when your brother or sister is being abused, where are you when our brothers are on the DL, where are you on the issue of sexuality or sexual orientation, where are

you on AIDS, teen pregnancy and female circumcision. Where are you on racism, hidden racism, social justice, economic development, segregation and re-segregation? Where are you in your witnessing to those who don't know Christ, where are you on the issue of more young men in prison than in school. Many of us are here and have not responded to the disclosure initiated by God. We have turned our attention to selfish motives and desire. The more we turn our backs from the presence of God we will continue to remain in silence on every aspect of our lives. We, as Jesus Christ believing Christians, ought to be willing to tear down the walls of oppression created by policy that keeps us from living the Christian life in the presence of God. When we know of a situation that calls for the breaking of the silence, we ought to do God's way and not our own selfish man-made religious way. As we continue with our man-made religious ways, we have moved further away from the presence of God and into our own secret garden. Even in the secret garden, God is still asking, "Where are you?" Just because you believe you are out of God's sight, it does not mean that God is not able to reach into the dark, secret garden of your life and initiates a disclosure that causes you to keep silent or break the silence. Therefore, when God breaks the silence in our lives, it takes a person who is devoted to the will of God or a person who did not cause the silence to break the silence that is causing the body of Christ and the world to decay.

Furthermore, God initiates dialogue. In verse 11 of this pericope, says that God asked Adam, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The dialogue continued from v9. When God confronted Adam, he denied his responsibility and blamed Eve. But if we look back at v6, we noticed that Adam was a willing participant in the act of disobedience. It was this

act of disobedience that caused Adam and Eve to be confronted by God. As we see, this dialogue was not one of praise but one of denial. When many of us are confronted about a situation or behavior the first reaction is one of defensiveness and denial. Often time when we are confronted with the truth, we will use silence or an excuse to avoid the question. When was the last time someone confronted us about a truthful situation, did we take responsibility or did we ignore the truth to get out of our responsibility? For Adam and Eve, their responsibility to God was found in **Genesis 2:16-17** And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Like many of us, God have given us a command, an order or a directive for the plan of life. We have made decisions in our life that are not in line with the plan God has given us. Some decisions have caused us to praise God when we have been confronted by our behavior and actions. Still, many of us are continuing to deny and blame others for the decision we made in life. Life is full of decisions, and whatever the decision we make, we are being held accountable by God for our actions and motives.

Finally, God initiates deliverance. Verse 21 says, "And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them". If we read v14-20, we find that God got to the bottom of the situation. Although Adam and Eve accepted the consequences of their actions, God still provided for them. Today some of us have been confronted by the decisions of our past which have haunted our present and making our future unknown. We feel if someone really knew what has kept us in bondage and away from the presence of God, we would think they would not love or be

associated with us. Actually, when we are in the presence of God and no matter what we have been through, deliverance is possible. We ought to be willing to be exposed to those whom God has placed in our life so that we can accept the unearned, unmerited, unfavored Grace of God. God wants to reach out to the people of God to restore the relationship intended from the beginning. When we break the silence in our life, community and world we are restoring the presence of God in those issues, situations and relationships that were once broken. As many times the Israelites disobeyed God, God still delivered them. As many times we have ignored the voice of God and the cries of our brothers and sisters, we still have an opportunity to be restored in the fellowship of God by breaking the silence in the land.

Therefore, when God initiates disclosure, initiates dialogue and initiates deliverance, God gives us another chance to get it right. Many of us are still fearful about being in the presence of God our eternal creator, but God knows we have gained bumps and bruises along the way of life. Some of us are faithful to God but our sinful nature will always travel with us as a reminder of what have shaped us into the strong person we are today. So when God calls us from the miry clay of life, God calls us with all our baggage and accountability. God knows we are not perfect and we must make the decision to either remain or break the silence. When God called Noah, a drunk, to build an ark, he came with all his baggage and accountability. When Rahab, a prostitute, broke her silence to save the two spies, she did it with all her baggage and accountability. When Moses was called by God to lead the people out of Egypt, he came with all his baggage and accountability. When the woman who was bent over for 18 years was called by Jesus, she came with all her baggage and accountability. When

Lazarus was called from the grave, he came wrapped with strips of cloth; but he came with all baggage and accountability. When God called us from a life of promiscuous living, drugs, poverty, hatred, bigotry, abuse, violence, racism, classism, ageism, separatism etc, we came with all your baggage and accountability. When God called me from the depths of Islam, the depths of the world and the depths of corporate America, I came with all my baggage and accountability. There is one more that was called by God. His life was mocked by shame and guilt, when he was on the cross he broke the silence by saying, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." For him and all who were there on that day God was silence, but when God broke the silence the veil of the temple was torn into two to show that there is no more separation between God and humanity. Also, when the women went to the tomb of Jesus and found it was empty, they broke the silence by spreading the Good News that our Savior has risen. Because of this broken silence, Jesus now stands at the door of our silence, knocking and knocking. Jesus is saying, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Jesus is asking us to let him in. Let Him in and He will shoulder our burdens. He will turn our sorrow in gladness. He will break the silence in our life. He will break the silence in our church. He will break the silence in our community. He will break the silence in our world. All we have to do is let Him in. When we admit that we need God in our lives, we are able to surrender all and say I need thee O I need thee every hour I need. O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee. Hymn 451