

**St Mark's, Niagara on the Lake**  
**The First Sunday in Lent, year 'A'**  
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**The Rev'd Leighton Lee**

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The opening chapters of the book *Genesis* contain several myths. Unfortunately, *myth* is a very misunderstood word. When people refer to myths, they tend to be talking about fanciful or misleading stories—like the Loch Ness Monster or that says vaccines cause autism. But as Joseph Campbell memorably said, “Every myth is psychologically symbolic. Its narratives and images are to be read, therefore, not literally, but as metaphors.” In other words, they are not a record of actual events, but attempts to put into human terms some truths about the nature of God and the reality of the human condition.

So, for example, the myth of the Flood gives a spiritual explanation for a great disaster that happened in the so-called “Cradle of Civilization” some five-or-seven thousand years ago, the remembrance of which was part of the collective consciousness of ancient people. The myth of the building of the Tower of Babel is a poetic description of how different languages came to be, and so on.

But most powerful of these myths, of course, is the Creation myth which magnificently expresses that the universe's creator and purpose are divine. And within this foundational myth is another powerful one about Adam and Eve and the eating of the forbidden fruit. On one level, it's about the development of human consciousness and self-determination. It's about how at some stage in everyone's life a break must be made with parental authority. But it's also about something else. It's about the nature of guilt and shame and what happens when we try to hide these things by creating a cover-up.

An acquaintance of mine, a lawyer who deals with financial crimes such as insider trading, once said to me that in almost every instance, it isn't the crime which is the worst of the event: it's the cover-up. This isn't to say that the crime itself is no big deal; often it's a very big deal indeed. But the cover-up leads to more crimes, more obfuscation, more excuses—each of which compounds an already serious situation.

Have you ever wondered about that curious line, “they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves?” Was there really nothing else a little more suitable at hand? A few years ago, I heard Anna Carter Florence—a well-known professor of homiletics in the Presbyterian tradition—tell a story of how she and her students once tried sewing fig leaves together. To no one's surprise, it didn't work. The leaves were so flimsy that they didn't hold together very well and so small that in order to get enough—um, coverage—one would need a great number of leaves.

Now, at the risk of stretching the symbolism of this myth of Adam and Eve too far, we are being told that cover-ups don't work, that they either fall apart easily or require too much effort to construct and maintain. It is far better to come clean.

Yet it seems we're genetically programmed to try to make excuses. Where do children learn to deny they've made a mess or smashed a vase—or whatever? Maybe it's because, deep down, what the Adam and Eve myth says is true: once we become aware of right and wrong, we develop a fear of authority figures, be they parent or boss or God, and are always trying to hide from them.

Alas, ours is still a world where the Non-Disclosure Agreement and the back-room conference remain the default methods for keeping uncomfortable truths hidden. Thankfully that's beginning to change as more-and-more we're coming to realize that we have an obligation to speak out about wrongs and injustices—a point so obvious it hardly needs to be said. (Yet it *must* be said because so often our response in the face of misbehavior and cruelty is an embarrassed silence.) However, that's not what I'm thinking about. I'm thinking about our own internal processes, our own proclivity to hide behind this-or-that flimsy excuse, our own fear of being “exposed.” If living this way becomes normative for us, we allow it to become normative for everyone else. If we're afraid of being who we are, then we start living in fear of finding out who others are, too.

Yet we can't hide forever—even when we're hiding in plain sight. For instance, for a long time LGBTQ2S people went about leading “normal” lives all the while having to hide our true selves because “society” marked that truth to be a dark and unforgivable secret. But the truth will out. Freud would tell us that the reason we hide things is because we still carry around a primal fear of a stern and unforgiving God-cum-parent figure. Except the power of that myth has long been broken by the great truth of Jesus, who revealed God's loving face to those who were afraid to be seen—or found out.

The phrase “I feel seen” is a popular one these days. A while back, there was a short article in *The Atlantic* which talked about the meaning of this popular phrase. “What does being seen feel like? I don't think we mean seen as in ‘viewed,’” the author wrote. “It's more like ‘I feel understood’ or ‘I feel affirmed’ or ‘I feel recognized.’ It's a feeling of identification with [another who] has truthfully reflected our own experience back to us ... To feel seen is to find comfort in the shared recognition of one's own experience.”

Though we try to hide from God, he still us—just as we are. And in Jesus, we see God for who he is, too. Our reading from Genesis stops before the part where God goes looking for Adam and Eve and calls out, “Where are you?” We've traditionally heard those as the words of a severe and incensed aforementioned God-cum-parent figure. But I think they're rather the words of a divine lover who wants to connect deeply with us and who sees us as we are. So they're healing words of forgiveness, mercy, and love, words which enable us to step out from behind our carefully crafted—if

flimsy—facades, to drop our masks and come out into the light of God's presence, not in our pretense, but just as we are.

*Just as I am—thy love unknown  
has broken every barrier down—  
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come.*