

No Need to Hide
12.10.25

Jane Ward-Hall

Gen 2:25-3:1-10
Mark 14:3-9

I find the first few chapters of the Bible so interesting. Genesis is an allegorical picture that helps me make sense of our human condition. The suffering and pain we now face were not God's original intention for creation. Remember "God saw all that He had made and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). That was before all the trouble started. Adam and Eve made a choice. They were swayed by the enemy's deception and disobeyed God. By the choice they made they were separating themselves, and all of us, from the source of life in all its fullness. The rest of the Bible is the ongoing story of God lovingly restoring everything, back to His plan A.

In Genesis chapter 2 we see Adam and Eve living happily in the Garden of Eden. They were both naked and they felt no shame. Naked has a wider meaning than just being without clothing. It means vulnerable. Adam and Eve were comfortable with vulnerability. They weren't ashamed of their vulnerability. But everything changes once they have eaten the apple. We can't help but notice the sharp contrast.

Just look at Chapter 3 v9

"But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." Adam was feeling so bad he had to hide himself away. This is what shame does.

Adam and Eve's nakedness and vulnerability are now very uncomfortable. Where previously they felt no shame now they feel it very strongly. They feel embarrassed and humiliated. No wonder they want to hide.

Shame is a very powerful emotion. It makes us feel we are flawed and unworthy of love and belonging. It's different from guilt which is a feeling as a result of behaviour where as shame impacts the core of us. Our identity. We feel we aren't good enough as a person. We will have all experienced shame from time to time.

A personal example. This year is 50 years since I married my first husband.

The shame I felt 17 years ago, going through a divorce, was huge. I hid away as much as I could. I thought everyone was judging me and assuming I must have been a terrible wife, one who hadn't been able to make her husband happy.

In my family I was a typical eldest child, the good girl, who was responsible and somehow had the perception that it was my good behaviour that enabled me to be worthy of love. These childhood scripts are hard to shake off. So when my first husband no longer loved me I felt I hadn't done enough, been enough. The trouble is I'm in danger of projecting the same pattern of thinking on to God. If I'm not a good enough Christian, will God cease to love me? I now realise this is clearly a lie. God's love for me, and you, is not based on us being good enough. He loves us because He is Love. Nothing can separate us from His love.

Shame has physical effects as well as emotional. It affects our brain chemistry causing us to separate ourselves from others and remain isolated. Hiding ourselves doesn't just mean avoiding the company of other people. It means hiding parts of ourselves. Developing a persona that we think will be acceptable to others.

Who wants to reveal their weaknesses? It's so much easier to keep them hidden, pretend they don't exist. Fear of being shamed is playing a role here.

Ever noticed if there is something in your family history that is never talked about? Maybe it's shame that keeps it hidden.

So if shame causes us to feel too unworthy to connect with each other we can understand why it's one of Satan's favourite tools to keep us distant from God. If we ever think "I'm not good enough for God as I am. I need to be a better person to make myself acceptable, loveable". Let me assure you that is all lies. If we imagine whispers like these in our minds, it is definitely not God speaking.

I chose our gospel reading because it reveals Jesus' attitude to shame. The men at dinner were shocked and disgusted by the woman's behaviour, pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' head. They rebuke her harshly, touching a rabbi, wasting the perfume, how disgraceful!. They were very keen to shame the woman but notice Jesus' reaction. It is totally different. His response is to defend her and commend her for doing something beautiful for him.

One of the things I love about Jesus is that He totally identifies with us. Everything we experience He has experienced. The gospels show us that Jesus is no stranger to the experience of shame. But Jesus never shames others no matter how they treat him. Jesus was abandoned by his disciples, humiliated by soldiers, rejected by crowds, despised by the Pharisees. He still knew his heavenly Father loved him.

Jesus wants to show us love and to heal our shame. But whatever is denied, hidden within cannot be healed. Moya used to say "God is a gentleman". He won't force us to let Him in. We assume acknowledging our shame and bringing it into the open will make it harder to deal with, we could lose all our friends. But the reality is the longer shame remains hidden in our unconscious, the more strength it gains. It's only through acceptance and openness, when we come out of hiding, that Jesus can sooth our wounds and heal the shame that's keeping us bound from connecting with God and others, receiving and giving love.

The good news is, as the whole of the Biblical narrative shows us, God keeps seeking us, coming after us, just as He sought Adam and Eve in the garden, in the cool of the day. God still calls "Where are you? Come to me. There is no need to hide. I love you."

Amen.