

Sermon for Sunday, January 14, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"THE GOD WHO ISN'T HIDING"

St. Matthew 27:33-54

Text: "And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."  
St. Matthew 27:51

In the Old Testament we are told the story of Job and his wife who experienced many terrible disasters as their goods were destroyed and stolen and their children were tragically killed. And when they were destitute and childless, when the body of Job was covered with horrible sores, his wife wanted to know where God was hiding when all of this happened. In anger and rebellion and hostility, she cried out, "Curse God and die!"

Most of us--at one time or another--have experienced the sense of frustration and futility of Job's wife. On that day when death hovered over a loved one--in that moment when we were crushed down by some failure--that dreadful night when loneliness overwhelmed us--that day when our very hearts were being squeezed dry in some inner pain and agony--yes, in those times when we needed him the most, where was God hiding? How do we beat down the doors that separate us from Him? How do we break through all those spiritual barriers to grasp with our own hands the reality of God's presence? Where is this hidden one whom we need so desperately?

On this day of Holy Communion as we come to the Table of the Lord, I would like to suggest that there is a profound lesson for us here. You see, this table is God saying to us, "Here I am before you. I did not hide from you. I came to live in your midst and to be one of you. Here represents what your world has done to me for the world crucified me. Still, I did not hide. I did not run away. Here before you is the evidence that I love you--my body broken, my blood shed--for you! And here is the symbol before you of my promise that by my spirit I will not leave you comfortless, but I come to you."

That is a staggering thought, is it not? God is not hiding. He has entered into our humanity. He has born our suffering. He did not turn away even from the cross. But if God is not hiding, why do we have such problems in finding him? If God is not hiding, why is it often so difficult to sense his presence? If God is not hiding, why is it so hard to have a continuing fellowship with him? And then the answer begins to dawn on us--if the fault does not lie with God, then we must be the guilty ones. If God is not hiding from us, then it must be we who are hiding from him.

Let me suggest several ways some of us hide from God. One way we hide is in our unwillingness to admit our sins. The Bible says that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But suppose I am unwilling to admit my own sinfulness--or worse still--suppose I am unwilling to turn from my sin? Is God hiding from me or am I hiding from God?

Do you remember what happened to Peter that day when Jesus came walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and stopped at Peter's fishing boat? Peter looked up from his nets right into the eyes of Jesus and then he did a strange thing. He fell down on his knees and said to Jesus, "Depart from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man." Peter didn't hide from Jesus behind some pretended goodness. And because he didn't, Jesus could say to him, "Come after me and I will make you a fisher of men."

Or look at Isaiah in the Old Testament. His king had just died and the nation was

threatened by hostile forces. Troubled in his heart, Isaiah went to the temple to pray and there he had a vision of God. Do you remember his reaction? "Woe is me,!" he cried, "for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips...." (Isaiah 6:5) Only then could God say to Isaiah, "whom shall we send and who will go for us" and have Isaiah respond, "here am I--send me."

Does that make sense to you? The man who cannot or will not face up to his own sin is hiding from God. You see, if I refuse to recognize the condition of my own soul, then God's healing love and forgiveness is not hiding from me, I am hiding from him. This table this morning says to us, "You don't have to hide any more. You can dare to admit your sins because I have died for your sins and you can be forgiven." Do you remember how St. Paul put it? He said, "the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners." (I Timothy 1:15)

Let me suggest another way we hide from God. At one time or another all of us come to hard places in life. We have some failure or we experience some agony of pain or suffering or some burden falls on us we feel we cannot bear. And at a time like that we want to escape--to get out from under--to avoid--this hard place in life. Yet, in the ducking and dodging we hide ourselves from God.

See how it works. Here is St. Paul and the Bible tells us he has a thorn in the flesh--some physical problem that caused him great pain. Three times St. Paul tells us he pled with God to take away the thorn. Suppose Paul had cried out in rebellion, "why must I suffer?" Suppose he had said, "I have been your faithful missionary and endured so much and this is unfair." Would he have not made his own health the condition of his fellowship with God? Would he have not been saying, "God, I'll be your man if you make me well." And that would have been hiding from God.

Do you see? We can't put any conditions on God. We can't say, "take away this or that; we can't say, make this thing go away or that thing not happen and I will have fellowship with you. No, that is to hide from God. St. Paul accepted his thorn in the flesh as a gift from the hand of God and when he did God said to him, "my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness." And that is sort of exciting, isn't it--to know that whatever life brings us, God isn't going to be hiding--we will find him right there in the middle of the worst that life can do to us.

In our scripture for this morning we read of the crucifixion of Jesus. As he died on the cross, a strange thing happened in the nearby temple of the Jews. The Bible says that the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now, that curtain was important. Behind it was the Holy of Holies--the place where the ark of the covenant was kept, symbolizing the presence of God. The area behind the curtain was so holy and sacred that no one but the high priest could go behind it and that but once a year. Yet, as Jesus died the curtain was torn in two. It was God's way of saying that whatever might have stood between God and man is now gone. It is God's way of saying to us, "I have given you all that I have and am--I have given you my son."

No, God isn't hiding. Here at the table he offers you forgiveness, he offers you salvation, he offers you eternal life, he offers you himself. And if anyone is hiding this morning surely it is not God.