

## Address by Bill Pattinson, 6 June 2021

When brother and I were just seven years old we moved house. One of the joys we discovered that, beyond the back wall of our new home, there was a beautiful playing field perfect for football in winter and cricket in summer. One side of that playing field fell into a hidden valley, a wild, expansive garden, full of bushes and trees. Many games of “Hide and Seek” would be played in “The Valley”. Our own back garden brings similar joys to Avril and myself today, albeit for different reasons. Although small, Avril, for she is the gardener of the two of us, has designed places where you can hide, or at least not be easily seen. She believes gardens should be places of unexpected discoveries around corners and on different levels. Now, verdant and budding in blazing June, hiding is not so difficult even in our garden.

Now we know that Adam and Eve were not playing “Hide and Seek” when “they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.” - I love that sentence from our first reading this morning. Thank you, Emma. They were indeed hiding, but hiding because they knew they had done the one thing God had asked they must not do - eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge planted in the centre of the garden. They were ashamed of both their sin and their nakedness. And when God asks “Where are you?” we hear in that question that God knows not only where they are, but also what they have done. How can you hide from the all-knowing God? As Psalm 139 says:

“You have searched me and You know me  
You know when I sit down and when I rise  
Lord, you made me, understand me  
You see where I walk and where I lie.”

Fat chance of winning an evening game of “Hide and Seek” with God or Jesus, because I like to think that the sound of God walking in the garden came from the footsteps of Jesus. Now one sin is exacerbated by another. Instead of admitting their guilt and seeking God’s forgiveness, Adam and Eve choose to play the “blame game.”

“It wasn’t me, it was her, whom **you** gave to me.”

“It wasn’t me, it was the serpent.”

How often have we heard that recently? How often have we played that game ourselves?

We also are presented with choices. We can blame someone or something for our wrong doings or seek God's forgiveness. We can listen to other voices or we can listen to Jesus when he comes calling, "Where are you?" At difficult and challenging times we can try and hide from Jesus or we can put our faith in him, walk with him, place our hand in his, follow in his footsteps, dance and sing with him. But who is this Jesus? What does he offer?

In this morning's Gospel Reading Jesus is accused first by his family of "being out of his mind." Then secondly by the scribes, who had specially come to see Jesus from Jerusalem, of being in cohorts with Beelzebub, better known as Satan. Immediately prior to these accusations Jesus had been followed by great crowds as he performed miracles, cast out demons, chose his twelve disciples. So busy was he, so hemmed in by the crowds, there was neither time nor place to eat. Perhaps his family believed he was out of his mind because he had left a prosperous carpentry business to become an itinerant preacher or that popularity had gone to his head? They certainly would have questioned the most unlikely group of disciples he had just chosen. The last straw was that his ministry meant he was missing his regular meal times. But when Jesus was told that his family were looking for him, he questioned who his family was. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Obedience to God's will would appear thicker than blood.

As for the accusation by the scribes that he drives out demons and performs miracles in the name of Beelzebub, Jesus questions how Satan can drive out Satan. The Devil would be fighting himself; Satan's house would be divided and a divided house quickly falls. I'm reminded of another game we used to play as boys based on the three musketeers. With sticks held aloft, joined at the apex, we would cry out, "All for one and one for all" or, as Dumas first wrote it, "Un pour tous, tous pour un". So powerful a statement that it is now the motto of Switzerland.

So, who is this Jesus? Viewpoints concerning the Lord Jesus Christ range from the sacred to the secular? As members of his family we call him Lord and Saviour. Jesus always stands before us as the image of unity, wholeness and integration. And what

does he offer? He puts our lives, homes and families back in order. Whatever it is that shatters our lives, that causes us worry, anxiety or stress - be it anger, greed, insecurity, fear, guilt, loneliness, loss, illness, growing old, pandemics, - Christ is stronger than all of these. There is nothing that cannot be put together by the love of God in Christ. The message is clear. Stick with Jesus whatever the cost.

Thus God comes calling us in the gardens of our lives. He is calling us to cover our nakedness with the garments which he supplies: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. He is calling us to be quick to forgive. And most of all he calls us to receive his garment of love, a garment so rich it will cover our brokenness, giving us wholeness and peace, when we receive it in humility and vulnerability.

Leonard Cohen sings:

“Dance me to your beauty  
With a burning violin  
Dance me through the panic  
Till I'm safely gathered in  
Lift me like an olive branch  
And be my homeward dove  
Dance me to the end of love”