

There is no more poetic verse than God's encounter with Adam and Eve after they succumbed to temptation. Genesis says they heard the sound of God walking in the garden and they hid themselves. Think about how terrible a change that must have been for everyone involved! God brought a cool evening breeze, but Satan brought a hot desert wind. One moment Adam, Eve, and God were best friends, and suddenly they weren't. More remarkable, yet, God continued to love them and walk with them.

Doesn't that eloquently describe daily living? We are torn between two worlds – the God's promises and wilderness temptations. These are our daily struggles, as we face the tension inherent in culture, schedules, families, current events, and everything that is confusing and conflicted in our world today. But Genesis was only the beginning of this unfolding drama that continued throughout Scripture and into today.

Mark's Gospel proclaims Jesus came to restore that refreshing breath of the garden, in a world that often follows a different voice. But it was not easy, even for Jesus! Many attempted to silence his message. Even his family was confused, and assumed Jesus was out of his mind. Rather than listen and be changed by his message, they wanted him to conform to their comfortable expectations. The voice of the serpent continued to distort the gentle breeze of good news Jesus brought into their lives.

What a parable that is for life today. How often do we paralyze the potential of faith by swallowing the tempting lures or siren calls of the world? I remember a similar time in my life when I was worrying and losing sleep over a situation over which I had no control. Like music that was so loud it couldn't be ignored, I kept listening to the wrong voice. Why it took so long to figure it out, I don't know, but when I finally surrendered my anxiety to God, trusting that He would handle what I could not, I found peace.

Adam and Eve (just like we do) took a wrong turn. And so, Jesus forsook the paradise of heaven to bring us back to the eternal Eden which we don't deserve! That is why we call this good news! This is grace. Undeserved love. A surprise rescue from the parched heat for desert dwellers, who are now gifted with green pastures, still waters, and a banquet table overflowing with refreshing and life-giving mercy.

Here is another way to make the point. Even in the desert there is water. In fact, there is water beneath every dry place on earth. During the greatest drought the US has ever faced there was more than enough water in great underwater rivers or aquifers to keep crops alive. But no one knew how close the water was and even if they knew, there was no technology then to pump it up from so deep underground. The irony of the dustbowl days in this country was that water and life were so close and yet so far away. That is no different from what Adam and Eve faced when they were locked out of the garden and were forced to live in the desert. God was so near and yet so far. What a parable for our lives of faith. Will we trust God or Satan? Will faith be enough, or will we decide we know better than God? Whom will we listen to?

Paul, in 2 Corinthians writes, “This momentary affliction (meaning life) prepares us for the glory to come.” With each step in the desert, we are reminded that this is a time of testing our faith, growing in discipleship, beginning to live as faithful people. In our present traumas, whether economic, health related, or simply the realities of a finite life on earth, in Christ we are learning to trust and live by faith when we can’t see an end to hot winds or are distracted by dried up crops.

Think the holy breath of God, which like a cool breeze is refreshing and full of moisture and life. Contrast that with the dry, hot, raspy voice of the serpent in the Garden or Jesus’ wilderness temptation. Too often we are caught between these two winds and are afraid to make a move. We look one way and then the other and are paralyzed by sin. It is like parking our car in the middle of a two-lane road, which only insures that you will wind up getting hit by both sides of oncoming traffic.

We can’t have it both ways. When it comes to faith, we either walk with Jesus or walk without Him. He is always reaching out to hold our hand and walk next to us along the way. Yet, if we don’t reach out, or our hands are full of other stuff, we will die in the desert, when the waters of refreshment and the cool breeze of the garden are so near. This is not to disparage the blessings and gifts of family, friends, shelter, jobs, food, and all the gifts of God. But if God is not first and understood as creator and the great forgiver, we will follow the wrong path and make selfish choices. Either we live with God first or we don’t. We can’t straddle that fence or go back and forth.

Many years ago, a journalist was walking through bombed-out streets of Beirut. He heard beautiful music coming from a doorway. He turned around and went back to see where such haunting music was coming when all he could see were ruins. He found an open doorway, looked inside, and found a young boy playing a flute. As that journalist looked more closely, he saw the strangest instrument ever. This young Lebanese boy had found a discarded rifle, taken a drill and bored holes into the sides of the barrel, and transformed a gun into a flute. What had been an instrument of death now had become a soothing sound of hope.

This is exactly what Jesus has done to sin and death as he transformed the tomb into a sound chamber for the sweet music of Easter. Jesus had bridged the gap between heaven and earth, between the garden and the desert, and has restored us to life. His promise is that by faith, we will daily walk side by side with a loving God in the gentle evening breeze of that perfect place of peace. The cross is a bridge that carries us safely home from the hot desert, into the cool evening air of the garden. Christ has placed himself squarely in the middle of our divided world so both sides can cross back to the only middle with any future!

That is good news. Sweet news. Great news! Even in the midst of death we are surrounded by life. Despite the conflict and confusion of a sinful world it is the sweet sounds of a loving God that instill peace that is beyond anything this world can offer. This is the good news we need to remember and share. It is the peace that passes human understanding and will never let us go.

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