

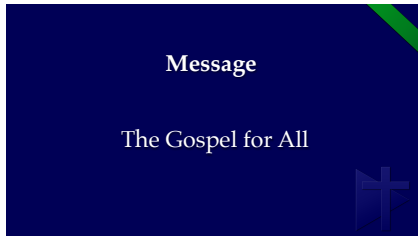
# The Gospel for All

February 2020

## **Genesis 3.8-13**

*God meets Adam and Eve in the evening*

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." <sup>11</sup> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

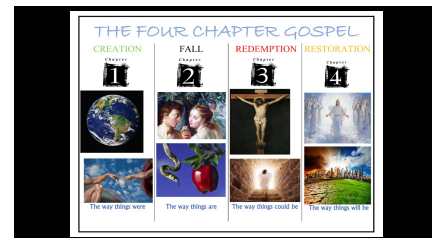


## **Setting**

The readings for today are instructional answering the question: What does God seek from you? <sup>1</sup> I want to let them speak without comment and share some Gospel insights that might be helpful for us as an international church. This message is going to involve some pain before arriving at a vision of Jesus and the cross that is has something for everyone.

## **Introduction**

To get started let's just remind ourselves again of the big Gospel framework. The story we live in has four big chapters which form a coherent Gospel.



The 4 chapters are:

1. **Creation**, very good news as told in Genesis 1 and 2. Creation is the work of a good loving and wise God who made us to be his friends in enjoying his creation. Humanity are given a link role between the creation and the creator. It is a place of dignity and honour.
2. Then not so good news but the next chapter that makes sense of reality. The **Fall** begins in Chapter 3 of Genesis and rolls on. This is grim reading and describes a damaging and polluting stain every dimension on what was the very good creation.
3. God's saving work of **Redemption** is from Abraham onwards until he comes in person in Jesus Christ to deal with the consequences of the fall by dying on the cross and rising from the grave.
4. The Gospel from then on is the foretaste and promise of creation's **Transformation** (*'Restoration' on the screen*) and especially humanity, in the freedom and victory won by Jesus. This continues until the day when all creation is renewed and God reigns again with his friends on earth.

We can summarize this Gospel as:

- Creation

<sup>1</sup> For the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany readings go to: <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=16>

- Fall
- Redemption
- Transformation.

This sets out the whole Gospel of God.

Take something out or neglect it and you have changed the story. This happens a lot mainly because some people like some bits more than others and the tendency to pick and mix.

Today I want to engage aspects of the fall and redemption in our lives

## Development

Can we go to the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 vv.8-13?

This is a painful story that will touch us all in some way.

Let's read it together from the screen:

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I want to suggest that there are three forms of pain that feature for Adam and Eve in that story of what happened when they met God after their disobedience.

God comes for his regular evening meeting with his friends in the garden he provided for them and this time, they are no where to be seen. So God asks that great question:

"Where are you?" Where are you Adam?

Adam is hiding but he answers and the sad painful conversation begins.

The first painful awareness Adam describes is fear. He hears God coming and he is afraid. In context we can read that as the first time he has ever been afraid of God. Something is wrong today!!

Adam says he is afraid because he is naked. That sounds like shame. Adam is conscious of who he is and it does not feel good.

God is hearing things that come through the violation of relationship through disobedience and disloyalty. Fear and Shame have never been there so God asks:

What did you do Adam?

"Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

What follows is a blame game moving down the chain of responsibility. Adam has the gall to even implicate God by first saying:

“The woman whom *you* gave to be with me, *she* gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

After hearing Adam admit fear and shame we see evidence of guilt as both he and then Eve share or shift responsibility from themselves.

## Reflection

We are now deep into the grim account of how humanity first experienced the awareness of having done wrong in disobeying God by believing a lie over the truth.

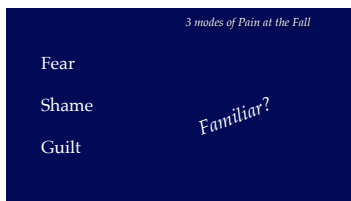
Let's consider the 3 forms of pain:

**Fear** is the anxiety over what someone or something might do to you. This is fear of power in others. It may be about punishment or simply the vulnerability of our own smallness. Can you relate to this?

**Shame** is pain over who we are. It can be a solo private pain or about our place and acceptance among others in community. ‘Loss of face’ is a way to describe this and shame can be seen when people cover their faces to avoid being seen.

**Guilt** is pain over what we have done. It's the jagged accountability of our conscience that cuts the heart when we have done wrong.

More physical social forms of pain will soon follow in consequence as well but for now Fear, Shame and Guilt are the three types of spiritual pain that came through the fall.



Now I want to ask you a question about these three forms of pain. Which one features for you personally?

I am asking you to recognize for yourself how the Fall most typically works its spiritual pain in you. Fear, Shame or Guilt? Can you recognize which of these figures most for you?

I am asking this painful question of people here from all continents of the world.

We are all children of Adam and Eve but our cultural backgrounds tend to feature some and not others. At the same time they may all be within us.

Everyone may know Fear, Shame and Guilt but there are some broad tendencies or biases.

If we start in the so-called ‘West’ the bias has traditionally been towards guilt. Doing wrong especially in the form of breaking the law is the most conscious form of sin and what is taken most seriously. There is a bias to be rules-based and take guilt very seriously. The law is the law and punishment follows!<sup>2</sup> That is perhaps why even today so much energy is invested in the body of national law as if that settles everything. But, as will become clear, that is not the whole story!

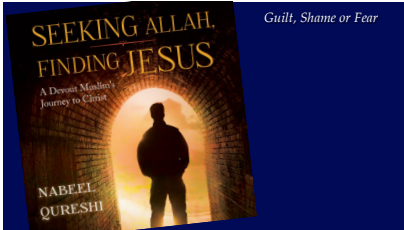
Western Christianity contributed to this by focusing on law and guilt as the core Gospel economy. Jewish and Roman law fed into this and the Protestant Reformation emphasized it.

So for Westerners focused more on the individual, the good news we want to hear is: “You are innocent of all charges. You are free to go!”

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch term ‘*Strafbaar feit*’ expresses this focus on guilt clearly.

Meanwhile in the more communal and less individualistic East, shame is seen as more of an issue than guilt. That horrible feeling that one is bad and people seeing you as bad is huge. Loss of face and loosing honour is very painful to the point where it shapes how people process all manner of issues. Honour must be maintained so honour restored is very good news.

*Example from Nabeel Qureshi's book Seeking Allah finding Jesus:*



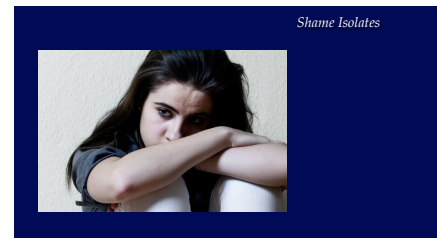
As a pious Muslim Pakistani-American he tells how it was quite normal for him to order a drink of water in a paper cup at fast food outlets but then fill this with soft drink at the dispenser. He was fine with this until the day a friend took him to task accusing him of dishonesty. What Nabeel then experienced was shame. He did not feel guilty about what he had done but felt very ashamed at having been exposed and corrected. He stopped doing this but the issue was shame and not guilt.

Then we come to Fear and Power. There is discussion around this but they are seen as very strong in African cultures with shame being close by perhaps more so for African women. This legacy of fear gives rise to the desire to control the powers in whatever way possible be that by clean or dirty means.

This three way split of sin's first wounds is only about recognized tendencies but it rings true in my experience within our diverse congregation. The point is we have different issues playing in our hearts that require a different gospel ministry.

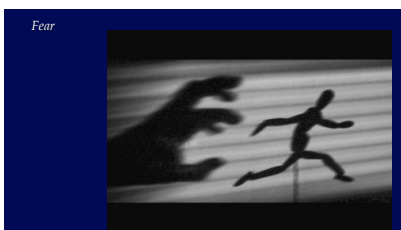
If you are wracked with guilt over what you have done then the Gospel of Jesus Christ redeeming us by bearing our sins on the cross and cancelling our debt is great news. When you accept Jesus as your saviour God declares you innocent before Him. Come to Jesus for Redemption!

If you are broken by shame you may feel like an orphan, cut off from God and God's family. Jesus bore our shame on the cross, he was shamed for us but the Father raised him to the highest place from where he calls you now. Come to Jesus and let his honour cover your shame.



As illustrated with the Prodigal Son, in Jesus God restores us to his family. He restores us in dignity that comes as a gift of love so that we come into the honour of a child of God. That is good news for people living with the shame over who they are or how they are dishonoured by others.

But then if you suffer with fear of power being used badly against you the good news is that God is the all-powerful one and God is good! He made us for blessing and honour and on the cross Jesus has defeated all the powers of evil.



It is Jesus who can set us free from Satan's power. He is the liberator not dark magic or spiritual manipulation. He has the power to bring us peace and protection because he has triumphed over evil powers!

## Application and Conclusion

I don't know what I may have stirred up this morning.  
It may be a memory of pain or spiritual pain that is still hurting now?

My pastoral purpose in bringing this today is the tendency I recognize at times for us to attempt to save our selves from our various forms of spiritual pain. Yes, Christians saving ourselves!?

The Bible tells us that God's loving purpose in Jesus Christ is that he be sufficient to redeem us from the consequences of sin in all its forms. He bore the pain for us.

In a summary verse Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1.30

Christ Jesus, ... became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

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He is saying that God's salvation brings the full healing we need and covers all aspects of our fallen state. In Christ we have: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption:

If I apply that summary to the forms of pain we may carry and what our culture sets us up for,

- Jesus is our Innocence, our Declared Righteousness before God. = *'Get out of Jail Card'*
- Jesus is our Honour before God and people. = *Come back into the family*
- Jesus is our Power and Protection. = *Safe Home*

So when I experience Christians who are seeking self-honour, self-power, or self-righteousness instead of trusting Jesus in these areas I draw a conclusion. Maybe that dimension of Jesus' saving work has not been accepted be it honour, power or innocence.

For example: If people make such a big fuss about their honour and social dignity, I wonder *hmmm?* Have they let Jesus lift their shame off them? Is Jesus their source of honour before God? Perhaps they are still fighting a battle with shame -this symptom of sin's power- they don't need to.

Hebrews 12.2 speaks to the pain of shame-

Look... to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

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If you are constantly thinking about saving your honour and avoiding shame, Jesus can restore your honour and dignity setting you free. We can find our honour in him.

Then if people can never admit a fault or work really hard to make someone else the guilty one I wonder. Are they still living with guilt? Have they perhaps not yet embraced the healing grace of God that makes us innocent through Christ? Blaming others is a sure sign of being caught up in something. With a finger extended in accusation three are always pointing back! Those who are blameless in Christ are secure in their innocence and not self-righteous or condemning of others.

A passage that says this well:

## 2 Corinthians 5.21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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This is also applies to how we look at each other. Would my criminal record influence the way you see me? How is my righteousness or that of anyone established in your eyes? Do you see Jesus alive in others or do you apply a measure of innocence compared to yourself or their paper record?

Finally we come to the question of power.

In my eyes if people practice manipulation in any form it suggests they fear the power of another and feel vulnerable. The good news is that:

## Romans 1.4

<sup>4</sup>Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

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Christ our Lord,

Being straight with Jesus, deep in our baptism connects us with the power of God through Jesus. We are not powerless and nothing can separate us from the love of God. If you know that, if that is deeply real then fear has nothing to hold.

If you don't know that and manipulation be it spiritual, social or whatever is what you do, come to Jesus. Let him take the fear and share his power.



So whether it be Fear, Shame or Guilt, They are consequences of the fall and sins power which Jesus has overcome and can lift off us.

This is the scope of his redeeming work in the hearts of those who receive him.