

Genesis 3:8-15 O.T. 3 (NRSV)

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” ¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3:8-15 O.T. Page 3
“Implausible Deniability”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. O God, you are our God, and we are your people. Speak to us today. Instruct us in your ways. Make us holy as you are holy. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: By in large the wrong we do; we do in secret. We do it when we think no one’s looking. Or we do it under the cover of darkness. We do what we do thinking we’re going to get away with it. But early in the Bible, in the book of Numbers, God has Moses provide this simple but ominous reminder, “**Be sure your sin will find you out**” (Numbers 32:23b, NRSV). It’s not a matter of “if” it’s simply a matter of “when.” **The lie** you told. **The money** you took. **The test** you cheated on. **The affair** you had. Sooner or later, they’re going to find you out. And when they do, what will you do? We’ll what most people do, **is they deny** everything. **But what if** they’re caught red handed? **Then they try** to shift the blame to someone else. They try to pass the proverbial buck.

Six-years ago, just before I left Union City, very early in the morning while it was still dark outside, someone crashed into the retaining wall at the far northwestern corner of the church’s property facing High Street. It was loud enough to wake the neighbors next door and across the street. They each looked out in time to see the vehicle back away from the wall at a high rate of speed and back into a tree across the street before fleeing down East High Street towards town. Back then I posted this picture on Facebook hoping it might lead to some clue as to who crashed into the wall. **Later that afternoon** a couple walked up to me while I was outside cutting the parsonage grass and told me it was their son who had hit the wall. **The description of the vehicle** and its damage matched. When the father confronted his son about the incident, **he denied** he’d hit the wall, but his father knew better, and his son still wreaked of alcohol.

The next day, the son called me to give me his insurance information in essence admitting he had hit the wall. **And then later**, when the police interviewed him, **he claimed** he had fallen asleep at the wheel. **He knew he'd been caught** red handed, so if he couldn't avoid the police charging him with fleeing the scene of an accident, maybe at least he could get away with having been drunk. But everyone knows that story just wasn't plausible. **While a person** who falls asleep at the wheel might veer off the road and crash into the wall, **a sleeping person doesn't** put the vehicle in reverse and slam into a tree before driving away.

It took a while, but slowly but surely his sin was finding him out. All I could do was pray he'd get help with his drinking problem before something far worse happened.

PAUSE

Move I.

Its human nature to say it's not our fault. We hem and haw; we spit and sputter, but we just can't seem to be able to find it within ourselves to take responsibility for the wrongs we've done. Since time began, we human beings have always tried to deflect blame from ourselves to others.

Our Bible lesson today is an ancient story that spells out the reality of the human condition in a very memorable way. This story has been effectively communicating the crux of the human condition for thousands and thousands of years. Adam and Eve ate from the tree God had told them not to eat, and when confronted with their disobedience, **Adam blames Eve** and **Eve blames the serpent**.

I want you all to take special note of the fact that Adam and Eve never denied they ate from the forbidden tree. **They knew they'd been caught** red handed, so rather than denying their actions, they blame others for what they did. In essence, they both said, "Yes God, I ate from the forbidden tree, but it was that sneaky serpent that made us do it." They didn't lie. In fact, every word they spoke was the truth. **When God** asked Adam, "**Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat?**" (Genesis 3:11b, NRSV). And Adam responds, "**The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate**" (Genesis 3:12, NRSV). Do you see that? **Adam says he did it**, but he doesn't take responsibility for his own actions. He's deflects blame to Eve.

And when God confronts Eve, asking her what she'd done, Eve says, "**The serpent tricked me, and I ate**" (Genesis 3:13b, NRSV). Like Adam, **Eve admits she ate**, but then she defects blame to the serpent. She says it's not her fault; that crafty serpent hoodwinked her. **Now this isn't as lame** as the fellow claiming he hit the wall because he fell asleep. **Eve isn't lying**. But it's still lame, because Eve, just like Adam before her, fails to take responsibility for the wrong.

You'd think we'd learn our lesson eventually. Its' bad enough to do something wrong in the first place, but then we try to cover up our involvement and we only make matters worse. **That's the classic lesson** from the Watergate scandal with President Richard Nixon from the early 1970s. It was bad enough that RNC operatives broke into the Democratic National Headquarters offices in the Watergate Hotel complex; but it was the futile attempt at a cover up **that ultimately drove President Nixon to resign**. Watergate was the scandal that gave us the now infamous phrase, "***It's not the crime; it's the cover up.***" If you mess up, don't try to hide it.

I wonder what would have happened if Adam would have responded differently. What if Adam would have said, "***Yes, God, I ate the fruit you told me not to eat. I disobeyed you God. I have sinned. Please forgive me and be merciful to me a sinner.***" History might have unfolded very differently. **But that's not want** human nature does. Rather than accept responsibility, human beings tend to deflect responsibility. **Yes, its human nature to say it's not our fault.**

End I.

Move II.

But God's sees right through our lame excuses. We can try to spin the facts to make things look more favorable for us, but God's not taken in by such shenanigans. "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). You might be able to pull one over on other people, **but you're never gonna pull one over on God.**

There's a saying most often attributed to Abraham Lincoln that's catchy enough it sounds like something he would have said, even though there isn't any hard evidence, he ever actually said it. The saying is "*You can fool some of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.*" If you've heard that saying before, raise your hand. (Raise hand.) Sure, most of you know that one. There're plenty of gullible people out there, but not everyone is gullible. I think there's plenty of wisdom in that saying so often attributed to Lincoln. The saying captures the diversity of humanity, but it says nothing about God. So, I was thinking, "How could you change the statement to include God." Well that's actually pretty easy. First, you read the statement verbatim. "*You can fool some of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.*" And then you tack on, "*and you can't ever fool God any of the time.*" God knows what you're doing, and when you're doing it, and even why you're doing it. **Nothing escapes God's all-knowing eye.**

Does anyone know what the fancy theological term for that characteristic—the characteristic that God knows everything? What's that called? (Wait for an answer? **Omniscience.** Turning once again to our trusty "*Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms,*" second edition, we find that the omniscience of God means, "**God knows all things, all events, and all circumstances in a way that is perfect and immediate.**" **Yes, nothing escapes God's all-knowing gaze.**

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews captures what it means to say God is omniscience. **In Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)** we read, **“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”** **God saw the serpent** trick Eve, and he saw Eve sharing the forbidden fruit with Adam. **Adam and Eve** might have been trying to hide from God among the trees of the garden in the cool of the evening, but God knew exactly where they were hiding. Knowing Adam and Eve were hiding, for a moment God played along saying, **“Where are you?”** (Genesis 3:9b, NRSV). It’s not that God doesn’t know where they were. Its kind a like what a parent does when playing hide and seek with a toddler. **You know, like when the toddler** claims to be hiding, but is really standing in plain sight with her eyes closed. **A few fig leaves** and a stand of trees isn’t enough to hide anyone from God’s sight.

I have to laugh at a line of tee shirts, buttons, and bumper stickers that says, *“Jesus is coming. Look busy!”* Are we naive enough to think we can fool God by faking busyness? Either we are about God’s business or we’re not. **God knows** what we’re doing, and when we’re doing it, and even why we’re doing it. **We can try to spin the facts** to make things look more favorable for ourselves, **but God really does see right through our lame excuses.**

End II.

Move III.

So, be honest with God and receive God's grace. There's no question Adam and Eve should not have disobeyed God in the first place, but once they did, they needed not only to fess up for what they did; they needed to admit to themselves that it was their own fault. "The devil made me do it" is never a valid excuse. The temptation does not cause the sin, the sinner does.

Our Bible Lesson today is the center part of the larger story in Genesis 3 that translators have historically called "*The Fall of Man*," or in newer translations of the account, simply "*The Fall*." The highly favored status Adam and Eve enjoyed both with the creator and the creation becomes tragically distorted. **The relationship between** humanity and the creation becomes harder. **Daily life** now requires hard work. Weeds and thorns now frustrate crop planting. **Pain** is now an integral part of the process of bringing new life. **And the relationship** between humanity and the Creator now feels more distant. It's not that God has moved any further away; it's that human perception has become less keen. **An evil fog** now clouds our view of God. **The story of "The Fall"** is the lenses through which we see the reality of our own brokenness and **understand our inner restlessness** for a more intimate relationship with our Creator.

Occasionally, you'll hear the story of Genesis 3 described as "*The Fall from Grace*." I have to tell you I'm not very comfortable with that description. None of the Bible translators describes the story that way. You might be surprised to know that the word "grace" never appears in the book of Genesis. In fact, it never appears anywhere in the entire Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible. **Yet, if you search Google** for Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel painting "The Fall of Man," you'll find many links **mistakenly calling** it "*The Fall from Grace*." **That's just plain wrong.** Adam and Eve didn't fall from grace; **they fell into grace.** "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin."

The Good News is even though we have disobeyed God and are worthy of death, God has not abandoned us to the grave. **God's graciously offering** to restore us into the intimate relationship that existed before the fall. **But we have to let go of** our "*Implausible Deniability*." We have to stop passing the buck, to stop deflecting blame, and to start relying on the forgiveness available through Jesus Christ. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9, NIV). That's grace. God's grace. **Grace that is truly** greater than all our sin! **So, be honest with God and receive God's grace today.**

End III.

Conclusion: The young man who hit the church wall in Union City said it wasn't his fault. He wasn't drunk. He fell asleep at the wheel. **Yes, its human nature to say it's not our fault.** We hem and haw; we spit and sputter, but we just can't seem to be able to find it within ourselves to take responsibility for the wrongs we've done. Adam deflects the blame to Eve who deflects the blame to the serpent. **But God really does see right through our lame excuses.** We can try to spin the facts to make things look more favorable for us, but God's not taken in by such shenanigans. Nothing escapes God's all-knowing gaze. **So, be honest with God and receive God's grace today.** Adam and Eve didn't fall from grace they fell into God's grace. A grace that is greater than all our sin. So, stop relying on "*Implausible Deniability*" and **start relaying** on God's grace.

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Oh God, we can no longer deny it, we have sinned and fallen short of your glory. Forgive us we pray and have mercy on our souls. **Amen!**

Communion: "*The Great Thanksgiving*" See Insert and On Screen

10:30 a.m. Closing Hymn: "Trust and Obey" Red Hymnal No. 467

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Are you playing the blame game? Do you just keep on making excuses? You know what—God's not buying it. Your deniability is implausible. Go forth and repent and rely completely on God's grace. **Amen!**