

“He took our shame” Based on Gen 3 & Rom 5.

Our theme for this retreat is “I will turn your shame into praise”. Our God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will turn your shame into praise. You know what shame is, right? I don’t mean a definition, but the feeling. The sense. The experience. Embarrassment. Not being good enough. Being a failure.

Not matching the standards. Your own or those set by others, by society. What is your experience of shame? Being poor? Being divorced? Being dishonest? Failing as a parent, as a spouse, as a child?

Someone whom I know well, recently picked up his daughter and carried her. Doesn’t sound like shame. Unless she is 15. Drunken unconscious. Laying on the ground in the middle of high school party. In Christian school. That changes it a bit... I am sure we all have had those moments when shame suddenly exposes you and you have one thought ... how can I hide? How can I get away!

You are not the first to experience it. None of us is. We just read that this was exactly what happened with our first parents Adam and Eve. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

They were fooled. They had terribly failed the One who had given them everything. They were naked, exposed... not being able to turn back time... and fig leaves wouldn’t be helping much either.

Then “they heard the sound of God Yahweh walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of God Yahweh among the trees of the garden.”

How childish they were. Hiding from God the Creator in the bush... very good idea, He will never find them. Aren’t we often equally childish? When we hide from our loving Father, from our Saviour Jesus.

We read that in the garden our loving God gently played along. He didn’t say: “Come on, I see you, and I know what you have done!” Instead: “Where are you, Adam? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” Come to me and talk to me. Tell me what has happened, what made you ashamed? This is what our Father is like.

Then the first murder that is recorded in the Bible took place. The first life was taken or lost. Or sacrificed. Why? So that the shame of our first parents would be covered. “God Yahweh made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

That was the first life, the life of an innocent animal, that was taken to cover our shame. But that wasn’t the last one... We know that God Yahweh came gently calling Adam. But we also know that our God is one God, but three persons.

Then who came looking for Adam? “No one has ever seen the Father...” John tells us. Then who came looking for Adam? That’s right, the eternal Son of God. It changes the story, doesn’t it?

Gives it a different flavour. It was the Son who came to our first parents, right after they had brought sin and death into God’s very good creation. It was the Son who right away gave the promise that He will restore what was now broken. He knew well what it will mean for Him – the sufferings, the shame and the death on the cross. This is how He proclaimed the Good News for the first time.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:15) Jesus from Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born from the virgin Mary crashed Satan’s head on the cross, and the ancient serpent bit his heel, taking Jesus’ life. On that cross that first Gospel promise was fulfilled.

People often wonder about the mystery of the Fall. Why did it happen? What to make of it? There is one thing that we can learn from this event. We can learn what our God is like. What happened helps us to see the depth of His love.

Remember, when God had finished creation, everything was ... very good. Is it hard to love something, or someone that is very good? Not at all. No effort required. In fact, if you are perfect, very good, then you can’t even know whether someone truly loves you or not, for your goodness simply invites and commands affection.

It is different when you are not good. When you are not perfect. When you are a failure. When you have fallen short. When you carry terrible evil in your heart. When there is not much to love in you. This is what we are like.

This is the test of true love. Can you love a sinner? You know what you have done and what you have left undone in your life. You know what kind of thought and desires you carry in your heart. If our thoughts for just one hour would be seen to the rest of us here on this screen, then we would know what shame is, wouldn’t we?

Our Father, He knows our hearts, and nothing is hidden from our Lord Jesus. He knows all things. Right after the Fall the Son revealed what God’s love is like – promising to lay down His life to save us. Not us as very good people, but us as sinners.

As Paul wrote, on the cross “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is how God reveals the depth of His love. When He shows us that He loves you not because you are good, or perfect, but when He loves you when you are not. When you don’t deserve His love. When there is nothing lovable in you.

Thus, our wretchedness reveals the depth of God's love. His actions speak louder than words. Adam and Eve felt ashamed and God sacrificed the life of one of His creatures, to cover their shame.

Two millennia ago, it was God Himself, the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His own life on the cross, so that He could turn your shame into praise. Our shame makes us feel naked and exposed, and we want to hide.

Jesus, our loving God, was crucified naked on the cross, His hand pierced by nails. No one came to cover His shame. He took our shame upon Himself. He took your shame and my shame, and the shame of every human being and nailed it to the cross.

Then He rose victorious, in glorious and beautiful resurrected body, dressed in divine glory and holiness, as the first among many and proclaimed the victory over all our enemies.

Sin has lost its power to destroy you. Shame can't make you hide from your loving Father anymore. Even death has lost its sting and has become a gateway to the New Heavens and New Earth.

Now this God, whose love is deeper than we can comprehend, and whose wisdom is unsearchable, He comes to us and similarly as in the garden of Eden, He puts around us new cloths. In our baptism, He puts around us Christ's righteousness. He encloses us with His Holy Spirit.

He comes and sanctifies us with His words, and washes our souls, our hearts, with His holy and precious blood, so that all shame is washed away, and we can stand before His kind and friendly face, – clean and beautiful, and praise Him for everything He has done for us.

He has turned our shame into praise. And this is just a beginning. This is just a glimpse. The full revelation of God's glory is yet to come. As Paul said: "For I consider that the sufferings [and we could add – shame] of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom 8:18)

This is our hope. "And this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Therefore, rejoice brothers and sisters, for your shame has been turned into praise. Jesus has done it.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord o my soul! Praise the Lord! Amen.