

Immanuel – God with Us December 1st, 2019

How many of you have ever played the game “**Hide-and-Seek**”, either growing up or maybe just recently?

Second question: How many of you have ever played a variation of Hide-and-Seek called “**Sardines**”? It’s a version of Hide-and-Seek that I used to play growing up. I grew up on a cul-de-sac and I have some very fond memories of playing lots of games in that street. But “**sardines**” was probably one of my favorites. In this game, you send one person out to hide and then after a pre-designated time everyone goes to try to locate them. When you locate the “*hider*” you be really quiet and hide with them. The game ends when the last person playing finds the hider and everyone else. It’s called “sardines” because you can end up with a bunch of people packed into a very little area. And we played that the “*hider*” could run from location to location to avoid being found, but as a group you always needed to follow them wherever they went.

I hadn’t played any version of hide-and-seek until several years ago when I used to watch a bunch of kids during a women’s Bible study here at church. What was so interesting about that was that they would all go hide in the same place, which made it pretty easy to find them. However, I also discovered that if I just pretended to look for them, it wouldn’t take very long before they would begin to yell out – “**We’re over here!!**”. They obviously wanted me to find them.

It doesn’t take us very long reading the Bible to discover the first instance of Hide-and-Seek. It occurs right after the first sin occurred with Adam and Eve both eating from the fruit on the forbidden tree. As soon as they did that it says “they realized they were naked” and tried to make some garments out of leaves to cover themselves. One author I read recently suggested that prior to their sin they’d be clothed in the glory of God and so they weren’t naked. But once they sinned that glory was stripped away and they now stood naked in their sin. What happens next is our first attempt at Hide-and-Seek. Notice who is the “*hider*” and who is the “*seeker*”.

Genesis 3:8-10 (NIV) *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

- Who was the “*hider*”? **Answer:** Adam and Eve
- Who is the “*seeker*”? **Answer:** God

You could easily substitute your name for Adam and Eve – because we all often hide from God. Over the years I’ve talked with many individuals who regularly attended Knollwood and then quit coming. And often I discover that the reason they aren’t coming is because they are hiding from God because of some sin in their life they’re struggling with. And their logic is that once they get this sin straightened out they will return to church. The truth is that they aren’t really hiding from God, just because they aren’t showing up at church. God isn’t confined to the walls of this building.

That was true with Adam and Eve as well. When God came seeking them he asked them “*Where are you?*” Why did God ask that question? Did He really not know where they were? No. God knew exactly where they were and what they’d done that had caused them to go into hiding. Part of our restoration back to God is for us to come to the realization that we’re running and hiding from God.

- Our sins can cause us to hide but that’s not all.
- We can get so busy that we’re essentially hiding from God.
- We can become so bitter over someone who’s hurt us that we create a hard crust around our hearts that in essence cuts God off.
- Complacency over our relationship with God can cause us to hide from God.

What causes you to hide from God?

We often assume that God created the universe, the earth and Adam and Eve and then shortly after that they sinned. But it's entirely possible that they enjoyed the close fellowship with God for quite some time before they sinned. It must have been incredible to have God right there in the midst of them in the most beautiful environment ever known. There was likely no fear or failure or disappointment or heartache within this garden. But then sin entered in and everything changed. In the morning of that day after, God came early looking for his children to enjoy being with them. But because of their sin, the close relationship they had with God was no longer possible.

As you read through the rest of the Old Testament, you see God often interacting with His people and chasing after them when they would wander away. **Hosea** is a great book to read about God's chasing after us when He had every right to just turn his back and quit seeking.

In true confession, sometimes when we played Sardines we would send someone out to hide and then we'd go somewhere else and play our own game, in other words, we abandoned the hider. Usually it was someone we didn't like very much. When they'd finally show up we congratulated them on being a really good hider and say that we tried and tried to find them but just couldn't so we gave up. They would often feel a little better, and we enjoyed our time away from them.

You need to know that God never takes this approach toward you. He never wants you to be separated from Him and He is often chasing you down and trying to reconnect with you and He does this in all sorts of creative ways that we often fail to realize and appreciate. But, while in the Old Testament we get glimpses into God's interactions with His people and various individuals, we never see God entering into their world and enjoying the same kind of close fellowship like He had with Adam and Eve. That's because of their sins, their many acts of turning their backs on God and going their way rather than God's way.

But the birth of Jesus is a game changer in this ongoing game of Hide-and-Seek. With the birth of Jesus we see that God was no longer way out there trying to hunt us down and find us, but He was actually coming into our world. He was becoming one of us. That's perhaps the clearest in the angels instructions to Joseph. Reading from Matthew 1:18-25

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV) This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was **faithful to the law**, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had **considered this**, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*"

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel***" (which means "*God with us*").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

I want to focus this morning on the title "**Immanuel**", which means what? **Say it with me:** "*God with us*". God has left heaven to come down to live with us, to become one of us, to connect with us, to come into our individual hiding places and invite us to join Him.

He's no longer a million miles away, but He's coming into our world. The creator of this massive universe we live in, that we still can't find the end of, this same God is now inside of Mary in the form of a baby, who was developing each and every week. God's seeking of us, is about to get very personal and close.

According to the Scriptures, we all have been hiding from God by way of our sins. Maybe your body shows the scars of your hiding and you often cover them up. Jesus' birth is God's declaration that He's come to you in your hiding places and wants to love on you and invite you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. He wants to free you from hiding and empower you to live with those scars. Our scars, both emotional and physical, don't have to define who we are. We are whole and complete and loved by the Creator of this universe. Our scars can represent steps along the journey of God healing us. And hopefully Knollwood is a place that can be safe for us to be open and honest about our struggles and how we've tried to hide from God and maybe others. Some of you have inspirational stories of how God's entered into your world and freed you from feeling like you need to hide your physical or emotional scars. A few weeks ago Theo was brave enough to share how God entered into his hiding and freed him. If there's others of you that would like to share, please let me know and we'll schedule a time for you to share that during a worship service. It's tremendously uplifting and encouraging to hear what God has done in other people's lives.

There's lots of stories in the Gospels about how Jesus entered into people's lives who were hiding and brought them out. One such story is about a woman who had been suffering for many years with a disease that caused her to bleed constantly. She'd spent all of her life savings on doctors with the hope that they could heal her but found no help. Then one day she hears that this man called, Jesus, is coming to town. There was a widely held belief at the time that when the Messiah came people could be healed if they could just touch the hem of his garment. So, she sneaks into the crowd and as Jesus is passing by she reaches out and touches the hem of his garment and instantly she feels the healing surge through her body. She quickly retreats back into the crowd. But Jesus wants to do more healing in this woman's life. Listen to what Jesus does next.

Jesus turned to the crowd and said, "Who touched me?" When no one stepped forward, Peter said, "But Master, we've got crowds of people on our hands. Dozens have touched you." Jesus insisted, "Someone touched me. I felt power discharging from me." When the woman realized that she couldn't remain hidden, she knelt trembling before him. In front of all the people, she blurted out her story – why she touched him and how at that same moment she was healed. Jesus said, "Daughter, you took a risk trusting me, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed!"

This woman had been healed physically the instant she touched the hem of Jesus' garment, but Jesus wanted to heal her emotionally as well. For several years now she had been labeled as "unclean". With this condition she wouldn't have been allowed to worship in the temple and if anyone else came into contact with her they would have become unclean. So, she no doubt had been hiding in shame for quite some time. So, Jesus took the time to call her out of the crowd, not to condemn her but to affirm her. He acknowledges the risk she took to come out of hiding with the hope of healing. By calling her "Daughter" he affirms her value and how special she is to him. Then Jesus affirms that she is not only healed but she's whole. Jesus comes into our places of hiding and heals our deepest scars and sends us out into the world to live a transformed life.

Hebrews 4:13 (NIV) *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.*

That can be a scary verse. Knowing that we can't hide anything, any of our thoughts or deeds from God. He knows everything every moment of every day. But notice the incredible freedom we have through Jesus Christ that He invites us out of our hiding places and into God's presence.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV) *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Jesus came into our world to be with us. He went through powerful temptations while living here. So, he's been one of us and understands our struggles. He was and is "Immanuel, God with us". I was just talking with someone yesterday who was telling me more about their life. And they shared that a few

years ago they got really close to someone who ended up accidentally overdosing on drugs shortly after that. But what allowed them to get so close so quickly is that this other person had gone through very similar pain and abuse in their past. Therefore, my friend felt a much deeper connection with this person. This passage is saying the same thing to us. Jesus is that friend and Savior, who cared enough to leave heaven, come down to our world and become one of us and went through the same struggles and heartache that you and I have. And then he willingly and lovingly gave his life up on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could have a restored relationship with God – like He'd originally enjoyed with Adam and Eve in the garden. Therefore, Jesus invites us to come out of our hiding places and come to Him where you can find mercy and grace to help you in your struggles.

“Immanuel – God with us.” What a beautiful and powerful phrase. We're going to sing a hymn of invitation. It's an invitation for you to come out of your hiding place and accept Jesus Christ and his payment for your sins and then enter into a renewed relationship with God. And God can become your hiding place from this point on. And when you accept Jesus Christ, you have **restored hope, as J.J. talked about.** There's nothing to hide from as a child of God, but only acceptance and love from the One who came to be with us and wants to continue to be with you every single hour of every single day of your life.

Remember at the very beginning of the sermon I talked about playing a game called **Sardines**. And I mentioned that one of the fun things was that after you located the *hider* you stayed with them and you could move around from one location to another while hiding. That's also true of your relationship with Jesus. He comes and finds you and after He finds you He doesn't get too busy or embarrassed by your behavior to abandon you. He runs with you wherever you go and is available 24/7. You never have to go into hiding again and you'll always have Jesus right there with you.

Hymn of Invitation

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Where do we find the first instance of “Hide-and-Seek” in the Bible?

- Who was the hider? _____
- Who was the seeker? _____

Why did God ask them where they were?

What has caused you to hide from God?

Are there any ways you’re hiding from God right now?

What hope do you find in Hebrews 4:13-16?

What difference does it make that Jesus left heaven and came to “*be with us*”?

Looking back at your life, can you identify times and ways that God sought after you in order to draw you into a relationship with Himself?

How did you respond to God seeking you?

Are there any sins of action or thoughts that you need to confess to God, claim his forgiveness and come out of hiding and into His grace and mercy?

Memorize the following verse, which will help you in the game of Hide-and-Seek.

Psalms 32:7 (NIV) *You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.*

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