

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Hear my voice!” AMEN!

Whenever I encounter the Garden of Eden story,
I’m reminded of why people (most people)
are terrified of snakes.

It’s because God put enmity between
the serpent in the garden and
Eden and her offspring.

That’s why we have the sudden
urge to kill all snakes when we see one!

My own fear of snakes has diminished
over the years though.

At least the non-venomous varieties, I can live with.

I know they have a purpose in
the balances of nature and I know I can
get over my gut-reaction of fear and
violent response.

Putting that aside for a moment then
I think about the familiar blame game
that Adam and Eve play when
they realize their disobedience.

And contrary to popular belief, it wasn't
because they ate fruit from a certain tree.

It was because they listened, believed, and followed,
a voice that wasn't from God.

The voice they listened to told them, "God lied."

The voice they listened to said that
if they ate something
then they'd "be like God." (Pause)

And it reminds me of the voices I've
listened to in the past, and
even the voices that still speak in the present.

You know those voices that say. "Take it,
it's no big deal.

It's fun! It makes you feel great!"

I don't just mean drugs, but
people steal for the exhilaration of it;
people are promiscuous for the thrill of it,
and people lie to gain authority
for the power of it.

There are all sorts of voices that tell us

we can be like God.

And it is much easier to name it when
we see it in other people, but an entirely
different story when it comes to naming it
in ourselves. (Pause)

That's what makes gossip so juicy and tempting.

It binds us to another person while we talk
about the ways a third person is behaving.

Gossiping helps us run away from our own failings
by pointing to another person's sins.

In other words, gossiping makes
people feel like God;

It deceives us into feeling
powerful, judgmental, and pure.

The voice of the gossiper is a voice
we always need to shutdown.

You know how to do that, right?

"Hey, did you hear about Becky?
She's (fill in the blank).

Can you believe she did that?"

You shutdown this by saying,

"That doesn't sound like the Becky I know.
Let's go find her and ask her." :-)

It shuts down gossip.

Even simply saying,

"That doesn't sound like the person I know,
and I don't want to talk about
something like this," works

because it brings the whispers that occur
in the dark out into the light. (Pause)

Adam and Eve tried to hide from God when
they knew they had done something
against God's will.

You're probably like me and thinking of all
those times we've tried to hide something
embarrassing or shameful we've done.

Then, in the same breath, you're probably like me
and can think of ways we can do the will of God.

We live in the sinner/saint tension.

What is the will of God?

It can be a hard question to answer,
but a good starting place is to pay attention
to the experiences of our lives when

we feel like we need to hide and then not go there,
or do that, or participate in that behavior.

It's can be a good place to start. (Pause)

Truth-telling, on the other hand,
is not the same thing as gossiping.

If you see something, then say something.

If someone needs help, then the will of God is
to help them or let someone
who can help them know about it. (Pause)

Last weekend was Synod Assembly weekend.

All of the visitors and voting members of
the Florida-Bahamas Synod descended
on Orlando to meet as a voting body
to fellowship and do the work of
the church.

The keynote speaker was the

amazing Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla.

At one part of his presentation, he asked for
us in the large group
to raise your hand if we

“Believe that the Church of Jesus Christ
has a mission.”

It was a no-brainer, right?!?

I raised my hand like probably half of
the assembly did, the others were just afraid
to be bold, I thought.

Maybe they were, or maybe they knew
something I didn't realize because
the Rev. Dr. Rafael said,

“We don't want to believe that
the Church of Jesus Christ
has a mission.”

We want to believe that “the mission of
Jesus Christ has a church!”

You see the difference?

The first way puts the entity of the church first,

instead of the mission of Jesus Christ.

We are a healthy church when we
put the mission of Jesus Christ first
because that is what makes us
God's church and not a club, or
just a philanthropic entity;
not only a meeting place.

Putting the mission of Jesus first means
that whatever we do, in accordance with
that mission, is the will of God.

If we put the church first, or (God forbid)
the pastor first, then you and I will be looking
for the will of God in discouraging places.

Which is why this lesson from Mark is so darn good.

Jesus' own family was not "getting" Jesus.

Some people will have a problem with
that interpretation, because it includes
Mary and Jesus' siblings, after all!

Surely they didn't think Jesus had
gone off the deep end, did they?!

But that's exactly what Mark wants us to know.

They thought he was crazy!

There motive may have been pure.

They wished to stop Jesus before
he got himself hurt, arrested, or killed,
but they didn't put Jesus' mission first
and therefore received a rather
cold shoulder from Jesus.

You see, we expect the Pharisees,
Sadducees and scribes
to be opposed to Jesus, but not
his own family.

And if his own family didn't "get Him,"
understand what he was up to, then
isn't it easier to understand that
his own church might not either?!

But, there it is!

If his family didn't "get" the will of God
then it becomes possible to see how
the church can be guilty of the same thing.

Thankfully that's not the end of the story.

It's just a part of the journey.

Don't let where you are right now
cause you to cease seeking
to do the will of God.

Don't let where you are right now cause
you to write off people
who aren't there, yet.

Oh, that's hard to do in this politically
charged environment, like ours.

With the tension of the coming election,
it can be hard to sit down to dinner with
some of our own relatives, right?!

But this is exactly the kind of behavior
that is God's will. (Pause)

You want to know what the mission of Jesus Christ is?

It is to listen to the cries of the people
in our community and responding to them
with compassion, and empathy,
forgiveness, and action.

That's what Jesus did for the world.

That's the relationship God desires.

A relationship that is characterized by growth,
deep commitment to one another, and
belief in continuing opportunities to be
a part of the will of God because that is,
exactly what you are!

AMEN!