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Pentecost III & Proper 5
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Text: Genesis 3:8 – 15
Title: Wouldn't Be Caught Dead

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It's still considered one of the greatest movies ever made. It's a story that is a true classic, and it has withstood the test of time. I'm talking about the epic film, *Gone with the Wind*.

Anybody who has ever taken the time to watch the grand story of Scarlet O'Hara knows why it has remained in the top ranks of great movies. Even people who haven't seen it all the way through know that it contains one of the most memorable quotes of all time. It's a line that has been repeated and parodied over and over again ever since it was first delivered by Clark Gable in 1939. His character, Rhett Butler, looks down at the pleading, manipulative Scarlet, and just before he turns and walks away he utters the immortal words, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

Now I've only seen *Gone with the Wind* once. Any other opportunity that I've had to see it I just didn't have the time to sit through the 3 plus hours of it. So I mostly remember the particulars of that scene because of the parody that Carol Burnett did of it on one of her comedy skits. If you've ever seen it, you know it's hard to forget. Carol Burnett as Scarlet gets the news that Rhett Butler is on his way to see her. Scarlet knows that her tattered and worn dress just isn't presentable to receive a man as important to her as Rhett has become, and in desperation she tears the drapery off of the window overlooking the grand staircase of her home. In the movie they have the time to make it into a decent looking gown, but the comedy skit version plays the situation out for all it's worth.

When Carol Burnett is next seen by the audience, she is walking down the grand staircase in a poised and dignified manner, but her dress is anything but. The curtain rod is still inserted in the fabric, and it's balanced on her shoulders extending out about a foot past her body on either side. The tassels are still on the fabric and hanging all over the place, and one of the gaudy draw strings now serves Scarlet O'Hara as a make-shift hat. Of course, the reaction of the audience is uproarious laughter, but the idea of the situation in the original film does get across.

In her vanity, Scarlet has decided that she simply can't be seen as she really is. She has to look her best for the man that she is about to see again, and she'll go to any lengths to make sure that she appears the way she wants to be seen. The modern phrase that might come to mind when you consider this and similar situations is that she wouldn't be caught dead wearing what is left of the tattered clothes that she still has.

It's a familiar story. Or at least it's a familiar situation that most of us have probably been in at least at one time in our lives. A visitor has come by with little or no warning, and you aren't in any condition to be seen. You're just too embarrassed by how you look or what you're wearing or the condition that your house is in. "I'd rather die than have anyone see me like this," you think to yourself.

And that brings us to today's Old Testament lesson. It's another familiar scene, but it's about some increasingly unfamiliar topics – eternal death and eternal life. Adam and Eve have done it. They've eaten the fruit that God had specifically told them not to eat. It was the only commandment that the Lord God gave to them, and they broke it anyway thanks to the temptations placed before them by the serpent.

Now the two of them are in real trouble and they know it. The sound was unmistakable. The Lord God was once again walking through His garden. It was one of the most pleasant

times of the day, but Adam and Eve don't even realize it because they are overcome by fear. For the first time they know fear. Fear of their nakedness. Fear of punishment and death. Fear of the Lord God's presence, and of His wrath.

And in that fear they hide from the very One who had created them. The One who had given them His own image of perfection, and who had only declared His Creation to be "Very Good" after He had created them. Now that they have eaten the only thing in the Garden of Eden that they weren't allowed to eat, they have discovered the awful truth of sin and the fact that it has destroyed their relationship with the very One who had created them. Before this they were in perfect communion with Him. Now they want nothing more than to hide away from Him. They would rather be caught dead than to have to appear naked before the Lord God and answer for what they have done.

And the ironic and worst thing is that they are already dead before they even hide away from Him in the trees. They are very much caught dead because as soon as the serpent had them convinced that they should want something more than what God had given them, and that they should be able to decide right and wrong and be like the Lord God, that is when their eternal souls died a spiritual death. Yes, their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked and no, their physical bodies didn't die right away, but when their relationship with the Lord God was destroyed their very souls died.

So there they sit in hiding, wanting nothing to do with the Lord God, and the Lord God had other ideas. He looked for them because they were the ones who were lost! Once sin entered into their lives and souls, Adam and Eve were lost and wanted to remain that way, and we their descendants are no better off than they were. We are dead in our sins, and our natural, sinful desire is to want to remain separated from God because of it. And in spite of our dead

souls constantly trying to drive us away from the only One who can give us life, He still seeks us out, just like He sought Adam and Eve until He found them.

And find them He did. The Lord God could have started over. He could have said, “Forget it. Everything is ruined.” And destroyed the entire, infected creation to start all over again, but He didn’t do that. He approached Adam and Eve and asked them three different questions to encourage repentance. Three different chances, but they offered the first excuses in human history instead. And we have learned well from their example!

I can’t tell you the number of times that I’ve heard this phrase from someone, “Pastor, I wasn’t in church on Sunday because...”, and I didn’t even mention that I noticed the person’s absence. The fact is that each and every one of us is aware of our sin, and when we’re confronted with it our first response is to cast blame and offer excuses. “I wasn’t in church or bible study because...” “I took God’s name in vain because...” “I don’t give as much to God’s work because...” “I passed along the gossip I heard because...” With these excuses you and I try to minimize just how serious our sin is. We use excuses to convince ourselves that it isn’t really all that big a deal, but the truth is that we do that to our own eternal peril because sin is poison to our eternal soul pure and simple. It wrecks our life on earth, and it destroys our life for eternity.

But the Lord God would not leave us in sin. He would not allow sin to have the final word over the crown of His Creation that He formed in His own image. So He went looking for Adam and Eve, and He continues to look for you. And when He found the two of them hiding among the trees with the serpent, preferring to remain dead in their sins rather than be confronted by His Holiness, the Lord God showed His continued love for them and for you. He showed His unlimited grace.

The Lord God found His dead creatures, and He intervened in grace with a solution to sin and its eternal consequences of damnation and hell. Even as Adam and Eve were denying their responsibility and guilt with their excuses and their blaming of each other and the serpent, the Lord God was ready to reveal His plan to defeat sin. He was going to show them and us that He was and is in control. He gave them and us His precious promise of a Savior to destroy the devil's work, and we have seen the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus.

At just the right time – that is God's time – the first promise of God found fulfillment. Jesus proved to be the solution that the Lord God was talking about when He put enmity between the woman and the serpent. He offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice, taking the sins of Adam and Eve and every human being to the cross. There He suffered the eternal consequence of our sins, paying the price in full for all of us. In Jesus, God kept His promise to Adam and Eve, and He keeps His promises to you too. The Lord God is faithful!

Just like Adam and Eve, you have been found by God's grace, and in Holy Baptism you have been included in the same promises of grace and eternal life that the Lord God made to them. In Holy Baptism, He calls you by your name, and He confronts the seriousness of sin's poison. In Holy Baptism, the Lord God's Holy Spirit gives you faith; He gives you forgiveness; and He gives you life everlasting.

When the time comes for the Lord God to fulfill all of His promises with the return of Christ, He will do so. He will come looking for us once again, and even though we know that we should be found dead, that won't matter to Him. He will find each of us with His unlimited grace and He will give us life everlasting through His Son. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.