

Lent 1 (A) – March 13, 2011  
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Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7  
*Naked*

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I guess today I would be risking a personal visit by *Child Protection Services*. But nearly 33 years ago, I didn't think about that. So every time a friend or family member made their initial visit to our house to see our first baby Clay, I'd rush to strip him down naked, and then I'd hold him up and declare, "Isn't he beautiful!"

On each occasion, I not only shocked the unsuspecting visitor, who would cast their eyes downward and mumble something like, "Yea, he is really...something...", but Kay never got accustomed to my proud papa antics. Honestly, I just couldn't help myself. I had never seen anything in this world as beautiful as our son. Unfortunately, I just got worse with the birth of the next two.

The birth our children exposed something in me that I did not know was there. First of all, I never felt so close to another human being in my life, and the connection was immediate and overwhelming. Secondly, when Clay was born, I realized, in that very moment, that my love for Kay and my devotion to her doubled – surely a miracle like that could only happen once. Yet then it happened again with Catherine's and yet again with John's birth. It was joy stripped of all precaution.

Samuel Wells, Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, reminded of those days when our three were babies. The distinguished theologian writes about – of all things – changing diapers. Wells states from experience that babies may throw a fit when first you lay them down to begin the process, yet once that diaper is off, they kick and laugh and roll and frolic with unrestrained freedom. Wells adds to his observation that if you catch babies at the end of the day, they may be cranky and tired, but just take their clothes off, sit them in a tub, and watch them revel amidst the warm water splashing on their bare skin.<sup>1</sup> That's the way to end the day!

God catches Adam and Eve at the end of the day with barely anything on – but it doesn't go like that. The two are not frolicking. They are hiding (**Genesis 3:8**). The snake leads Adam and Eve to eat the fruit off the tree that God said was off-limits. Coolly persuasive, evil slithers into their lives and says, "This fruit won't hurt you. It'll open your eyes!" (**Genesis 3:5**).

Their eyes are opened all right, but they suddenly don't like what see – in themselves or in the other. What began as beautiful seems to have turned rotten somehow. So they hurriedly cover themselves determined to hide from each other, and – in a mad-cap way – they scurry to hide in the garden from God. What a far cry from a naked baby splashing rapturously in a warm bath tub!

But Adam and Eve are in "hot water." They can no more hide from God than we can, and – Lord knows – we try! We begin by partitioning ourselves from one another, then distancing ourselves from the earth – the garden we've been given, and finally playing a silly game of hide-n-seek with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Wells, "Living by the Word," *The Christian Century*, March 8, 2011, p.18.

Do we really think we can hide from God? Do we imagine that we can drop off the radar screen from the One who formed us and made us a totally unique, one-of-a-kind, first edition amongst 7 million others? No, not really. We're just ashamed of the rotten mess we've made of ourselves.

Why would God want to find us anyhow? What can He possibly see in us now? ..... God sees His beautiful child cavorting about and stripped of all the dark pretense with which we have clothed ourselves.

How can that be, because I don't feel a thing like that child I once was? Well, it takes another tree. This tree is not in a garden but set on a bald hillside used as a city trash dump. There we stripped, humiliated, and killed the most beautiful one of us – Jesus. And because he freely offered himself to eclipse all the darkness we have allowed to slither into our lives, the first ancient prophecy of Isaiah has come true: *Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like purest wool (Isaiah 1:18).*

Just how do we do that? On this first Sunday of Lent 2011, how do we get back in spiritual shape? Get ready... this is a word we don't like... take a DEEP breath – because we must *submit*. We must finally surrender to the love of Christ demonstrated on that tree at the top of the trash dump. That's where every bit of our rotten life must be deposited. We need only surrender to Christ in order for that to happen. Do that and we will have the best Lent ever. Paul issues the promise this way: *We were buried with Jesus by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).*

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus, I have listened to the wrong voices and have taken a back road that leads nowhere and it has taken a bite out of my life. I bend the knee of my heart to you in utter, unreserved submission, and ask that you bury all the rotten parts of my life. Please put my life back into shape with yours. I want nothing more than to know that you will hold me up again and declare, "Look how beautiful!"*