

Reeks: Bewegings van die *Journey*

Titel: *From Hiding to being Found*

Prediker: Trevor Hudson

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Good morning, friends. It's really good to be with you. This is the first time that I'm with you in 2011 and it gives me an opportunity to extend to each of you my own wish for you, that this year be a good one. You will know that here at Mosaïek we're on a journey and there are three movements in this journey. It's a journey to God, to Jesus Christ, it's a journey into community and it's a journey in service in the world. And I pray that in 2011 that you'll make some movement in these three different dimensions. If you look inside your bulletin - you may want to do that - there's a leaflet and it has the theme for today. There's also some space for you to make one or two notes, if you'd like to do that, things that you may think God is drawing your attention to, or saying to you and you may want to just write that down so that you can think about that later as well.

There are two readings, the one from Genesis and the one from Luke's gospel, so I'm going to read the first one, Genesis chapter three verses one to nine. Many of you are familiar with this story, but let me read it to you: Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made and he said to the woman, did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden? The woman said to the serpent when they eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say that you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it, or you will die. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman, for God knows that if you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, it was also pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and she ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked and so they sewed fig leaves together and they made coverings for themselves. And 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 amongst the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called out to them, where are you?

If you turn over, you'll find one of the stories that Jesus told. Jesus told many stories - we call them parables - and here is one from Luke chapter 15 and we watch the wonderful dawn [?]. I find it very special, that's just brought this alive earlier in the service. Jesus told this story: Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and she loses one, doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and her neighbours together and she says, rejoice with me, I have found my lost coin. In the same way I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And so we thank God so much for that reading today from the Scriptures.

Friends, have you ever noticed that if you read the Bible carefully, have you ever noticed that you don't only come across God's answers in the Bible? Now there are some wonderful answers in the Bible to some of the deepest, deepest issues that we face in our lives, some wonderful answers. But have you noticed also that there are not only God's answers. In the Bible you also find God's questions. Throughout the Bible, if you read it carefully, from the beginning to the end, there are literally tens of questions that God puts to people. Questions that God asks us, and all I want to do as we stand on the edge of a new year, all I want to do today, is I want to ask you to join with me as we engage one of these questions that God asks. And it's a very relevant question and you will see that soon. It's particularly relevant at the start of the year. It's a question that if we really engaged it, I think can lead to some wonderful changes in our lives, in our relationships, in our work even. But most especially, it's a question that if we really take it seriously - if we really take it seriously - can open our hearts and our minds to a fresh experience of God's tender love.

It's the very first question that God asks in the Bible. Do you know it? Adam and Eve are in the garden, do you remember? And in many ways Adam and Eve represent you and me, every man, every woman. God gives them everything that they need in that garden for a decent life. God gives them air to breathe, God gives them food to eat, God gives them work to do, God gives them each other to love. What more do you want? What more? God just says to them there's just one thing I don't want you to do. Not ten things, not a hundred things, just one. Just one. I don't want you to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden; I don't want you to do that. And you will know the rest of the story. Adam and Eve refuse. They refuse. They make a conscious decision, a conscious choice not to acknowledge God. One of my favourite scholars of the Old Testament... let me tell you, you'll never remember his name - it's quite something - Walter Brueggemann. He writes... he's just a wonderful Old Testament scholar. He makes the observation that that is the defining pathology of our day, our refusal to

acknowledge God. That lies at the root of all our chaos and pain and heartache, our refusal to let God be God, our wanting rather to play God. We want to play God; we want to be in charge, we want to call the shots.

And as soon as Adam and Eve make that decision, as soon as they make that decision, their lives are plunged into confusion and chaos and mess and pain and heartache immediately, immediately. They were living happily before that, afterward they're at odds with themselves, they start blaming each other, their own relationship goes down the tubes and before they know it, they even find themselves disconnected, estranged, separated from the God who gave them life. And it's against the backdrop, that backdrop of the mess and the muddle of their lives that we come across one of the most beautiful scenes in the whole Bible. It's like a poetic scene; God comes walking in the cool of the evening breeze and God comes looking for Adam and Eve, and God calls out to them. And here's the question; God asks them one question: Where are you? Where are you? And that is the question that I want to place at the centre of our hearts and our minds today. Where are you? Where are you at the moment? Where are you? That's the question God asks us today. I've been living with that question for the last few days. I've lived with it before in my life, but I've been living with it very consciously the last two, three days and I just want to share some of the things that that question has been doing in my life, and I hope that if I do this, that God may speak to you a word today.

The first thing that this question does, this question, where are you, it invites us just to stop and to think about our lives, to reflect on them. To think about how they're going at the moment and that's one of the hardest things to do. It's one of the hardest things to do today, it's just to stop and think about our lives. It's kind of go, go, go, go. One of the words I hear, usually from people younger than myself, which means all of you, is the word hectic. You know, how's it going? No man, it's hectic, really hectic. How are your relationships? No, hectic. How's work going? No, hectic. How did the new year start? No, it's like it's hectic, man. It's go, go; that's the culture we're part of. I walked down the street in Durban and I see the name of a restaurant, Gobble and Go. How's that? That's what life's about, gobbling and going.

And God... in the midst of this hectic world, God says, where are you? Where are you? Where are you at the moment in your relationship with God? Where are you? Are you going deeper or are you staying on the surface? Where are you? Where are you at the moment on the inside of your life? Where are you in your thoughts, your feelings? What's going on inside of your life at the moment? Where are you at the moment in your relationships, in your marriage? Where are you? Are things growing? Are they stagnating? Where are you at the moment in your work, in your career, in your experience of God's calling in your life, in your ministry? Where are you? Where are you? God wants to engage you this morning around this question, and I think wonderful things, new things, fresh things can begin to happen when we engage this question.

I've just come back from ten days leave in Cape Town. Cape Town is different to Benoni; yes it's different, but it was lekker to be there. You know, run on the beach, swim in the sea, watch some cricket at Newlands. You won't believe this, but I was at the cricket with my son and my daughter's boyfriend, and we had our photographs taken and we were put on the front page of Die Burger. How's that? I've made it. Front page, front page. My son says to me, see what happens when you stick around me, Dad? I told Johan Geysers that, he said, Trevor, did you have a beer in your hand or a Coke? I said, don't worry man, I had a Coke. Last Sunday in Cape Town I went to a lovely church in the centre of the city. It's pastored by a friend of mine, it's one of those churches that brings together rich and poor, young and old, black and white and during the service, my friend used a poem and as soon as he shared this poem, I knew I wanted to share it with you today, especially because of this question, where are you. It's a poem by a woman called Portia Nelson. I've never heard about it, but it's called My Autobiography in Five Verses, and here are the verses.

Here's verse one: I walk down the street; there is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost. I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes me forever to find a way out. Verse two: I walk down the same street; there is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault and it still takes a long time to get out. Verse three: I walk down the same street; there is the deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately. Verse four: I walk down the same street; there is the deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it. Verse five: I walk down another street.

You see, that's what happens when we take time just to stop, to let God engage... Where are you? And it's when we stop and think about that question that we begin to make other choices; maybe to walk down a different street and maybe we're going to walk down this street, maybe this time with God.

Where are you? Where are you? But this question doesn't only invite us to think about our lives, this question, where are you... how do I put this? It calls us to come out of hiding. To come out of hiding. Adam and Eve, as

soon as they blow it, what do they do? They hide. They put fig leaves together and they hide amongst the trees. It's our deepest human tendency is to hide. It's to hide, especially our mess, especially our pain, especially our heartache, we hide... we hide. And God's question, where are you... and that's why I love that song. Wasn't it beautifully sung? You don't have to hide anymore. We can come out of hiding and we can come into a place of honesty and openness and transparency and that's where change happens. That's where newness begins to be born, when I come out of my hiding place. I think of all our different hiding places, some of us hide in our busyness. We love to keep busy, because if we can stay busy, I don't... I can just hide; I don't have to face things.

I was watching Top Gear – I don't know how many of you guys watch it – Top Gear yesterday. What's his name, Jeremy Clarkson, and he was into this... Those of you who don't watch it, it's a programme about motorcars. And so he's interviewing a guy - a well-known guy – about cars. This guy's in his 60s, he's a well-known person to a UK audience - I didn't know him too well – and then Jeremy Clarkson, in the middle of this interview, asked a very unusual question. He said to the guy, didn't you wife die last year? And the guy said, yes, and I saw him choke up a bit. And then Jeremy Clarkson - in the middle of the show – said, how are you doing? And this was the guy's answer: I don't think about it. And he was almost breaking up. I don't think about it, I just keep busy. And some of us hide in our busyness because we don't want to deal with the pain and we don't want to deal with the grief, and we don't want to deal with the heartache, so it's go, go, go all the time.

Some of us hide behind masks, don't we? We just wear masks. We pretend to be who we're not. I love the story of that guy who goes to the doctor and says, Doctor, I'm depressed. I really need help, man. I need help. The doctor says, don't worry, I don't have to give you pills. In town at the moment, right at this moment, there's a wonderful clown. Just go and see him. You won't be depressed anymore. You will laugh and laugh and laugh. He's wonderful and he's so funny and so light-hearted, and his name's Grimaldi. The guy says, it won't help, Doctor. I am Grimaldi. And that's our story, we wear these masks, we pretend to be happy when we're cracking up inside. We play Happy Families and there's anguish in the home and loneliness and strangeness. We pretend to have it all together when we know deep down it's all falling apart, but we pretend. And pretend people have pretend relationships and never moving to reality. We hide. Some of us hide in religion. We use a lot of religious language, but... it's a lovely place to hide sometimes. Sometimes we hide from God in religion.

Where are you? It's an invitation today, at the beginning of the new year, to come out of hiding. It may be painful, it may be difficult, but it leads to life. My deep... I'm not going to tell you the story of my life and you're so happy about that, but my deepest experiences of God's grace have been in times when I've come out of hiding. Those are the moments when God has just touched me so deeply and done things profoundly in my life, when we come out of hiding.

But I come back to that question: This question invites us to stop, to think, to reflect. What road are we walking down? Do we want to change? What hole are we falling into? This question invites us to come out of hiding, to come into the open, to come into a place of openness and transparency and honesty, that what you see is what you get. And this is the last thing: This question – and this is what I don't want you to forget – this question, where are you, takes each one of us into the searching heart of God. When God asked Adam and Eve, where are you, in effect God was saying to them, I want to find you. I want to find you. My heart breaks over the distance between us. My heart grieves over the separation between you and me. I want to reconnect, I want intimacy, I want partnership, I want friendship, I want us to work together again. I want you to be part of my dream. Where are you? Think of the questions that God could have asked, that God doesn't ask. God could have said to Adam, why did you do this? Why did you blow it? God doesn't ask that question. God doesn't lay more guilt on us. God doesn't say, after all I've given you, how could you have done this? God doesn't, God says, where are you? I want to find you? In the heart of God there is a love that searches for every one of us.

Can I ask you to grasp one thing this morning? In the Bible, the God we meet in the Bible, the God that we meet in Jesus Christ is a God who longs for us, who wants to find us. God is like a divine lover who pursues us passionately until he finds us. And God will never wash his hands with you and God will never give up looking for you, and God will never say, I'm drawing the line now. Never. The search goes on relentlessly, passionately. That's what Jesus' message was all about. Why did Jesus always hang out with people who had messed up? Why? You tell me, why? Because he wanted them to know that God was looking for them, that God hadn't given up on them, that God wanted to find them. The only time Jesus has problems is when he goes to church. The only people who struggle with Jesus are the supposed good people, the religious leaders. Jesus reveals to us a God who longs for us. He tells the story, he says, God is like this woman, she's got ten coins; she loses one of them. What does she do? Well, she's got nine, she forgets about the one? No. She lights a lamp. Can you picture that scene of that woman dancing here? She lights a lamp, she gets a broom, she looks, she sweeps until she's tired?

No. Until her husband comes home? No. She searches and she searches for that coin until she finds it. Until she finds it.

God's looking for you, looking for you with love, with deep love. And God comes to us in 101 different ways every day, reaching out to us through creation, through books, through poems, through movies, through the Bible, through friends, through people. Even now through my own words, God is looking for you with love. Will you let yourself be found? Will you let yourself be found? Come on, just let God find you. A few years ago – and I end with this – I was reading the Pretoria News and it was on page two I came across a little story – it was a one-column story – that somehow was a parable for me of the searching God. It was the story of a mother and she's playing with her child, evidently, somewhere in Pretoria North, in one of the streets. Her child's a toddler and in that street there is a manhole which is not covered up and for a moment, the mother does not concentrate on her child and when she looks up, the child is nowhere to be seen, and the child has fallen through the manhole into the streams of sewerage that flood under the city. And she hears the cry and the scream of her child. She rushes over and she dives into the darkness, into the gloom, into the sewerage, into the stream, and for over one hour underground, reaches out for this child in front of her, her child who is being swept away for hundreds and hundreds of metres underground in the darkness - can you imagine? – until she lays hold on her child's life and body. And somehow for me, when I read it, it was like the lights went on. This is what God does. God steps in through the manhole from heaven to earth, into the sewerage and the muck and the mess and the pain and the heartache of our lives, and searches for us. Searches for us with a love that will not let us go until it finds us. Will you let yourself be found? Will you let yourself be found? So just one question today: Where are you? Where are you?

I want to bless you before you go home. I love doing this at the start of a new year and in every congregation I've been, always at the beginning of the year I like just to bless people. So I wonder if I could ask you to stand just to receive the blessing that I want to speak into your lives in God's name and on behalf of Jesus Christ. I want to bless you. I want to bless you, each one, with a profound sense of God's searching love for your life today. I pray that God will bless your spirits, the spiritual part of your life, that you'll come alive with new life spiritually this year. That there'll be new faith and new hope and new love, that God will bless your emotions with new rich, deep emotions of joy and wonder and delight and all. That where there is sadness and sorrow and pain, there will be the fresh green shoots of a new joy, even in the midst of the pain. May God bless you with that. May God bless your minds, your thinking, the way you think. May God bless you with new thoughts, rich thoughts, deep thoughts, new ways of thinking, creative ways. New insight, new clarity, new clearness, that where there's darkness and confusion, there will come new light. May God bless you. May God bless your bodies, that where there's sickness, there may be health; that where there is struggle, there may be recovery; that where there is weariness, there may be a fresh energy. May God bless you, bless your bodies. May God bless your relationships, your marriages, your friendships, that where there's distance, there may be a new closeness; that where there is strangeness, there may be a new intimacy; that where there's withdrawnness, there may be a new coming together. May God bless your relationships. May God bless you with a new awareness of people around you, with new attention. May God bless your work. May God bless what you do tomorrow morning, through the day. May God bless your work with new growth, new depth, new meaning, new insight, new dreams, new visions. May God bless your work. May God just bring you alive in a new way to Creation, to this universe, to this world, to the sky and the mountains and the rivers and the grass and the butterflies and the dogs and especially the cats. May God bless you. May God bless you with a new aliveness to God, to God's self, to Jesus Christ, throughout the universe, through the Holy Spirit alive and at work in our lives. May God bless you, Friend. May God bless you. And above all, may the joy, the wild, wild, wild joy of Jesus Christ be with you. Have a good one.