

# Hiding Place

Psalm 32:1-7; Luke 19:1-10

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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On March 24, 2015, twenty-eight-year-old Andreas Lubitz deliberately crashed the Germanwings plane he was co-piloting from Barcelona to Dusseldorf into the French Alps, killing himself and 149 other human beings.

I remember being stunned at the time. *What could possibly drive someone to do such a thing?*

So, I did what I often do whenever I read of inexplicable deeds committed by people far away, whether it's the latest mass shooting in the States or bombings in Somalia (as in the news this morning) or some other terrible thing.

I spent part of a morning drifting around online, reading anything I could find that might make sense of the senseless and might give some insight into the actual human being that committed this horrible deed.

In the case of Andreas Lubitz, there were reports of torn up doctors' notes, of past "depressive incidents," of his attempts to hide his illness from employers, of an "existing condition with appropriate medical treatments." A picture would certainly gradually emerge of a troubled and unwell young man.

But as I read these profiles, I was also struck by how utterly *ordinary* and non-threatening Lubitz seemed to everyone around him. Neighbours report very little of note—nothing that would even remotely hint that he was capable of doing what he did.

He seemed not to have any radical political or religious leanings. He passed all his flight tests (including psychological tests) with flying colours. He appeared to genuinely love his job. He was part of a hang-gliding club. He even seemed to be a regular jogger.

How could this ordinary human being be responsible for such a reprehensible deed?!

Whatever dark secrets, whatever anger or despair Mr. Lubitz might have been carrying around with him, he seems to have hidden them extremely well.

This incident was, for me, a stark reminder of a basic truth. As human beings, we are very adept at hiding.

This is as true when it comes to wicked deeds that are committed seemingly without warning as it is in everyday life.

We are hiders.

We hide because hiding at least some of who we are is an essential way to make our way in the world

We laugh at little kids who so often say what they're really thinking minus the filters that we accumulate over time. But as we get older, we learn that saying what we *really* think is dangerous.

We know that revealing who we *really* are can lead to getting wounded, that it might open us up to ridicule and misunderstanding. We know that our professional and social lives often depend on keeping some things tucked safely away, never to be exposed to the scrutiny of others.

We all hide parts of ourselves from others every day, sometimes probably in ways we are barely even aware of.

The human story is a story of hiding. In the biblical narrative, it doesn't even take three chapters for hiding to make an appearance. What's the first thing that Adam and Eve do after their famous transgression?

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**" (Genesis 3:9-10).

I was afraid. I was exposed. I hid. And the fear and the hiding have continued unabated ever since.

We don't all have horrible secrets like Andreas Lubitz (thank God!). But we all hide.

We hide because we are afraid of transparency. We hide because we are ashamed of the things that we have done, the things we *continue* to do, despite our best intentions.

We hide because we do not want to be truly seen, by others or by God.

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David speaks of hiding in our reading from Psalm 32 this morning.

We don't know what personal circumstances motivated David to write this song, but we can safely assume that he was not in a great place.

When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
<sup>4</sup> For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.

This is metaphorical and hyperbolic language, obviously, but it conveys something of the desperate place that he found himself in. Hiding takes a toll, physiologically, mentally, and spiritually.

Leslie Brandt's paraphrase of the Psalms puts it like this:

Every time I attempt to handle my own guilt—  
by ignoring it, rationalizing it,  
or just running away from it—  
some unseen power or pressure  
from the depths of my being  
squeezes my life dry, leaving me empty.<sup>1</sup>

Ignoring, rationalizing, running away... I think that we all have at least some experience with these things. We know how heavy hiding can feel.

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie F. Brandt, *Psalms/Now* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 51.

So, David is hiding. Until the hiding becomes too much to take and he moves to honesty and confession:

Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not hide my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the Lord."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.

*And you forgave.* Those three words could well sum up so much of the gospel. *And you forgave.*

Our reading ends with verse 7:

You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

The Hebrew word for "hiding place" here is *cether* (say-ther). It conveys ideas of shelter, of protection, and covering. It speaks of safety, of trust, of freedom from the shame that comes with hiding.

David has gone from hiding the darkest parts of who he is to calling God his "hiding place."

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How do we get from hiding to taking refuge in God as our hiding place?

The short answer is via the path of honesty, vulnerably, and confession to God.

But to get *there*, we somehow must get beyond our attempts to manage, control, limit the damage, to be the little lords of our own lives.

I'm not a huge fan of religious cliches. You know the ones, "God never gives you more than you can handle," "When God closes a door, he opens, a window," etc. But even the most cringe-inducing cliches have a grain of truth to them.

For example: “Faith in God begins where faith in oneself ends.” I wouldn’t have had much use for this saying as a young man. I would have probably thought, “Yeah, ok. Whatever.”

But I had a different reaction when I came across it this week in David Zahl’s *Low Anthropology*, a book I’ve referred to often lately in sermons and on my blog.

This time, I stopped. I read it again. And then again. I underlined it. And then I underlined the words that preceded it:

We require a crisis of capacity to direct us “where true joys are to be found.” Jesus confronts us with our limits, not to discourage us but to engineer a situation in which the phrase “what is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27) might find traction. **Faith in God begins where faith in oneself ends.**

I want to read the first part of the sentence again: “We require a crisis of capacity to direct us where true joys are to be found.”

I wonder how many of us would say something similar about our own lives. I won’t ask for a show of hands, but I wonder how many of us would point to a crisis in our lives, whether of capacity—we realized that we just couldn’t do it all anymore—or of some other kind and say: that’s when I needed to lean on God the most. That’s when I had to really *have* faith instead of just *saying* that I had faith.

It was in an acknowledgment of my frailty, my limitation, my sin that true joy and acceptance forgiveness and wholeness became possible.

David Zahl goes on:

This is why a religion of low anthropology tends to resonate with those who find themselves defeated by life rather than with folks on the upward swing. Those whom life has forcibly divested of illusion and idealism relish the sympathy they hear in a message that takes into account the shipwrecks of life. They naturally gravitate away from messages about participation and partnership and toward ones about absolution, reconciliation and resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Zahl, *Low Anthropology: The Unlikely Key to a Gracious View of Others (and Yourself)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2022), 195.

We might say it a bit differently. Those who have realized they have nowhere else to hide and are weary of the effort.

Those who, to repeat a theme from last week in our story about the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple, realize that they are sinners in need of the grace of God.

Those for whom those three words—*And you forgave*—do not represent a nice bit of abstract theology but a lifeline.

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Well, speaking of tax collectors, in our gospel reading this week, we meet Zacchaeus.

The Romans couldn't always be bothered to gather their own taxes from their various subjects. So, they conscripted the subjects themselves to gather some lower levels of tax.

Jews, for example. Jews like Zacchaeus.

And these tax collectors almost always skimmed a bit off the top for themselves. Zacchaeus was a wealthy man, our text says, and nobody in Jericho would have had much doubt about where his wealth had come from.

So, he was a thief and a traitor—a collaborator with the hated Romans. He was in the eyes of nearly all, a sinner.

But this tax collector isn't face down pleading for mercy in the temple like a good sinner; he's a curious onlooker when Jesus comes to town.

He's heard rumours of healing, perhaps. Or of Jesus' provocative teaching. Or some of his other miraculous signs. He knows this Jesus is causing a stir and he wants to see what all the fuss is about.

So, he climbs up the sycamore tree to get a better look.

But I have a feeling that it wasn't just idle curiosity that led Zacchaeus to the top of that sycamore tree. I can't prove this—Luke doesn't give us all the details we might

prefer—but I don't find it hard to imagine that Zacchaeus, too, was going through some kind of "crisis of capacity."

Perhaps the guilt and the social ostracism were getting to him. Perhaps he was wondering if collecting taxes for the Romans was really what he was made for. Perhaps he had done terrible things that were gnawing away at his soul. Perhaps he was feeling worn out, depleted, defeated.

What we do know is that Jesus was a magnet for sinners, for people at the end of their ropes, people out of options with nowhere else to turn, people who had come to the end of themselves and no longer had the illusion that they could manage thing on their own.

Well, Jesus tells Zacchaeus to get down out of the tree and invites himself over for dinner. And this dinner changes everything.

Here again, we don't know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus. Did he confront him about his shady "business practices?" Did he ask about his childhood? Did he ask him why he was so curious? Again, more details please, Luke!

All we can infer is that whatever happened in this meeting, Zacchaeus's life was turned around by an encounter with Jesus. He stopped hiding and came into the light.

Zacchaeus famously responds with the truest form of repentance. He changes his life and promises to right all those he has wronged.

And Jesus offers his own equally famous response:

Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.  
For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost (Luke 19:9-10).

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Perhaps you, too—like David, like Zacchaeus—have reached a "crisis of capacity."  
Perhaps you, too, are looking for where "true joys might be found."

Perhaps you, too, have come to the end of what is possible and are looking for a state of being where the phrase, "what is impossible with man is possible with God" might find traction

Well, this is the “come to Jesus” part of the sermon. Not in some kind of engineered “altar-call-y” kind of way. I’m not about to play “Just as I Am” and invite you to come to the front. This is not that.

But it is an invitation to honesty, to transparency before God, to confession. It is an invitation to give up hiding from the God who already knows you better than you know yourself...

And to discover in this God a shelter in the storm, a protection, a hiding place.

There is hope and joy to be found in being known as we are, in being forgiven, and for experiencing the freedom to move forward in grace.

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most beautiful chapters in all of Scripture. *Love is patient, love is kind, love never fails*, etc. It’s a text often used at weddings even though it is about far more than romantic love.

But as I frequently marvel at the love language contained in this passage of all passages, I often skip right by verse 12:

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

The hope of new creation means many things to many people. Peace, justice, harmony, the wiping away of every tear, life eternal, *shalom*.

But we also look forward to the experience of *knowing* and being *fully known*.

Just as we are. No filters. No shame. No more hiding.

Because the one we spend so much time trying to hide from is in the end our one true hiding place. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

