

I think one of my least favorite expressions in the modern vernacular is the phrase, “Throwing somebody under the bus.” Don’t you agree with me that’s a terrible expression? I mean, that can’t be pleasant. Between the diesel fumes and the 15 tons of steel and glass, nothing good ever comes from being thrown under a bus. At the same time, it is a wonderfully graphic, metaphorical expression to describe what happens when you blame someone *else* for something they didn’t actually do in order to save your own hide.

Public examples of this abound. I think back, for instance, to the time when cyclist Lance Armstrong threw his teammates under the bus as he was trying to defend himself against doping allegations. Presidents often throw cabinet secretaries under the bus when something happens in their department that could reflect poorly on the Oval Office. I’m not the world’s biggest fan of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, but that guy has bus tracks *all over* his face.

And in the well-known story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there’s some serious bus-throwing-under going on – even though buses hadn’t been invented yet. God confronts them with their sinfulness, and their first response is blame. Adam throws Eve under the bus, Eve throws the serpent under the bus, and both come out looking like what they truly are: a man and a woman broken by sin.

Just listen to the dialogue: God asks Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” And Adam immediately replies, “The *woman* gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” Then God asks Eve the same question and she says, “The serpent *tricked* me, and I ate.”

They don’t accept responsibility or immediately confess their wrongdoing and ask for divine forgiveness. Who knows how the story would have played out if that happened? But it doesn’t. And we’re left with a pretty ugly window into the human soul.

Because isn’t that so often our first reaction when things go wrong? We get defensive and blame others. Admitting our mistakes is so hard to do because we don’t want to seem weak or incompetent; it’s not good for our public image. So we make excuses, we shift the blame, we play responsibility dodgeball (another interesting expression to have entered the modern lexicon).

And we do this because deep down we're ashamed of our behavior. Shame is one emotion that Adam and Eve are very much in touch with. They know they have done something they should not have done and they seek to cover it up; literally, by grabbing fig leaves and metaphorically, by throwing others under the bus.

Now, you have to be careful when you talk about shame in the context of the Fall story. There's a misconception that the story of Adam and Eve is all about shaming the human body; or at least it's been used to perpetuate the concept that nakedness is something to be ashamed of. That thought runs pretty deep in the Western psyche.

But what *is* nakedness anyway but *a symbol of extreme vulnerability* – something we seek to avoid at all costs? It's why we feel the need to project an image of strength and prosperity and shove anything that smacks of vulnerability as far below the surface of our lives as possible. Because if we come across as vulnerable, we fear that someone will exploit that weakness.

Yet human beings are by their very nature vulnerable creatures. To be human is to be imperfect. And try as we might, we can't hide from this fact. Which is why the fig leaf is such a hilarious image. Not because it makes a pretty lousy cover up, which it does, but because we can't hide our imperfections from God.

This is one of the reasons I so love the Collect for Purity – that prayer Anglicans have been saying at the start of our liturgies since the mid-1500s. "Almighty God unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." That's a pretty vulnerable place to be! It doesn't say anything about being naked but it absolutely embodies the image of standing naked before God. You can put on as many layers of clothes as you can find; you can even put on a coat of armor; but it doesn't do a thing because God know our hearts, our desires, and our inmost secrets.

And while at one level this is terrifying, at another level it is a source of great freedom and comfort. We don't have to be anything other than our true selves in our relationship with God. We *can't* be anything other than our true selves in our relationship with God. We stand utterly naked before God and God loves us anyway. God loves us precisely for who we are in all of our goodness and in all of our sinfulness. And that is the great blessing of our faith.

Now, please don't take this the wrong way or quote me out of context but when it comes to our relationship with God, the church should really be a nudist colony –

metaphorically speaking. It should be a place where we are able to fully be ourselves with one another without shame or fear. We have a way to go to get there; we have some layers to strip off. But that's the source of true strength – acknowledging our brokenness and accepting God's love for us despite our failures and shortcomings.

And that's really at the heart of Jesus' message isn't it? That despite the fact that God sees into our hearts and minds and souls; despite the fact that God knows our true desires; despite the fact that we can keep no secrets from God; God loves us fully, completely, and with reckless abandon.

It's a message that Adam and Eve just couldn't wrap their heads around until it was too late and they were driven out of the Garden. Yet Jesus, who is often referred to as the new Adam, shows us that there is indeed another way. When you come to terms with your vulnerability and stop throwing other people under the bus when things go wrong, you become uniquely empowered. You're given the freedom to be the fully human person God has called you to be. We need the Garden of Eden to see this and we need Jesus to lift us out of the depths of sin into the life of abundance that God has prepared for each one of us.