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I imagine the Garden of Eden
being something like the weather in Georgia this time of the year.

Things heat up;
 an afternoon dip in the pool is always appreciated.
But the days start off cool.
 I wear a jacket in the morning
 when I take my dog for a walk.
 I don't have to wear it,
 but the air is crisp
 and carries none of the heat to come.

And then the evenings.
 The sun is up late this time of year,
 but we aren't yet trapped
 in the oven of August and September.
 We don't yet have the humidity of July.

Come the evening,
 as the sun begins to set,
 the breezes begin to blow
 and the day cools again.

Everything feels possible:
looking back at a day accomplished
or abided
or simply endured
- a night of rest and not fitful sleep,
perhaps even a nice dinner,
even if it's just a bowl of cereal
in front of your favorite show.

*Evenings this time of year
are full of grace and mercy.*

A reprieve from the heat
and yet filled with the reminders of life all around
- tomatoes yellow in flower,
the soft rustle of green leaves,
and the air free of the pollen
which dominates early spring.

*Evenings this time of year
are full of grace and mercy.*

I imagine Eden being something like that.

*They heard the sound of the LORD God
walking in the garden
at the time of the evening breeze.*

The Bible isn't usually very specific.

We are used to novels that spend paragraphs and pages
painting the scene for us
- the color of the leaves
and the way things felt,
the taste of the late summer peaches,
and on and on.

The Bible is high literature,

but it is from a different time.

It is mythic and legendary in scope.

The Bible,

especially in these early stories from Genesis,
is more concerned with the very biggest of pictures
than it is in the kind of details that so often hook us
in our reading
and in our telling
of stories.

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They heard the sound of the LORD God

walking in the garden

at the time of the evening breeze.

And then we are caught up short,

hearing a detail like that.

At the time of the evening breeze.

It is so tender.

We imagine the scene.

The LORD God

- written all in caps by the way.

The LORD God

- the YHWH God,
the God of all Creation,
the God who made heaven and earth,
the God of gods
and the one who cannot be defined,
high and lofty above all the heavens

- the LORD God walked the garden alongside them,
at the time of the evening breeze,
at the time of day
perhaps most redolent
of grace and mercy.

Does that feel very far away from you?
Does the idea of walking the garden with God
seem like more a hope for heaven
than a way to live right now?

You aren't alone.

I feel blessed when I catch sight of the garden.

What hides it from us,
most of the time?

What separates us from that?

What keeps us from knowing God in that way

- walking alongside us,
the way we know the gardenias and the magnolias,
carried along the air of early June?

We are no different from the first people:
 the people who told these stories around the campfire
 or Adam and Eve,
 the prototypical first people.

From the first people until today,
 we are not much changed.

Fear.
 Fear keeps us from knowing God,
 from walking alongside God.

*But the LORD God called to the man,
 and said to him,
 "Where are you?"*

*He said,
 "I heard the sound of you in the garden,
 and I was afraid."*

Why is the man afraid?

God has given them everything.
 God has given us everything,
 but **we** can more easily pretend otherwise.
We can convince ourselves
 that what we have is a result of our efforts,
 that our successes belong to us
 and our failures are just bad luck,
 or something we can blame on another.

Adam's response of fear would make perfect sense for any of us,
 but I am baffled to see it in him.

Perhaps, in the deep darkness of our souls,
in the shadowy and the mournful places
where fear finds its root,

- perhaps we are not afraid that there won't be enough FOR us.
Perhaps,
like Adam,
we are afraid that **we** will not BE enough.

That there is something missing,
not outside us,
but within us.

Perhaps that is the shadowy cord
with which we drag the long bag behind us.

The bag into which we cram the parts of ourselves we find shameful,
the parts of ourselves we have heard spoken ill of,
the pieces of our 360 degree radiance
that somehow seem less-than
when compared against the world around us.

The man and the woman were afraid.
They broke the rule.
They took the part of themselves that broke the rule
and they stuffed it inside the bag,
they hid it behind their fig leaves,
and they blamed the serpent and each other.

What might have happened?
What Eden would we know
 if the man and the woman had not hidden in fear?
What might have come to pass
 had they stepped out,
 into the light
 and walked again with God
 in the cool of the evening breeze?

The LORD God
 - written all in caps.
The God of creation,
 the YHWH God
 who would one day free the people from slavery in Egypt,
the God who cannot be defined
 and yet would one day choose to be born into the world.

The God who would die on a cross
 and defeat death forever.

What might happen
 if WE stepped out of the shadow,
 out of our fear
 and toward that God?

What end would we find,
what beginning?

The answer,
 for the rest of the Bible,
 for all the stories told
 and all the ones yet to come,
the only answer I know
 is grace and mercy and love.

But we are too often too afraid for that.
too afraid to come out walking in the evening breeze.

And so God,
the LORD God
the God of gods,
high and lofty above all the heavens,

God
will come and find us,
in the cool of the evening,
in the blaze of sun,
in the dark of the night,

God
will come alongside us,
even to the darkness of the grave,

and God will raise us,
in grace and mercy and love.