

“The Other Side of Eden”

Genesis 4:1-14

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Introduction:

The story that we read happened after God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (in Gen. 3:23). The setting of the story is on the other side of Eden. I really don't like this story initially. Why? Because as a parent, I cannot imagine my own children doing this to one another. Every time I see my children love each other, I feel like God is in heaven and all's right with the world. This morning, let me walk you through the story in Genesis 4:1-16 using the following as our guide: BODY: (1) THE FAMILY; (2) THE OFFERING; (3) THE CONFRONTATION; (4) THE SIN AND THE JUDGMENT; and (5) THE MARK

The first point is: THE FAMILY. We notice that after they were banished from the Garden of Eden, life did not end for Adam and Eve. God had given them another chance, a picture of His grace in action. Genesis 4 opens with “Adam knew his wife, Eve” – there was still love and relationship. God did not give up on them. Let us look at the meanings of the names of the sons of Adam and Eve: Cain means “to create,” he was the firstborn; Abel, comes from a word that means “vapor and nothingness.” According to Heide De Jonge, in her article, “Beyond the Lectionary Text: Genesis 4:1-14,” these names were given because “Perhaps Eve and Adam wanted to leave the legacy of both sides of their existence: blessed by God with life and creation, yet living under the shadow of death and nothingness. Cain and Abel – life and vapor – grew up side by side, playing and fighting as brothers do.”¹ Gen. 4: 2 says, “Now Abel kept flocks, and

¹ Heide De Jonge, “Beyond the Lectionary Text: Genesis 4:1-14,” available from <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/non-rcl-starters/genesis-4-1-14/>; accessed 21 March 2018.

Cain worked the soil.” So, the family has protein, etc, from the animals that Abel is tending, and carbohydrates and minerals from what Cain plants. It looks like one happy family. I want to believe that Adam and Eve had taught their children to talk to God (we see in the story that God talked with Cain), to obey God, and to offer sacrifices to Him.

The second point is: THE OFFERING. We see this in verses 3 and 4. The narrator of the story tells us that both brothers brought offerings to the Lord. But there is a twist to the story. Verse 4 says, “The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” This is where the conflict started. Why did God look with favor at Abel’s offering but not on Cain’s? I consulted some sources on the answer to this question. And here is what I found:

First, Keith Krell, associate professor of biblical exposition at Moody Bible Institute wrote that Abel offered “firstlings of the flock,” the “fat portions” while Cain just brought an “offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground,” not the “first fruit.”² So it was a matter of giving God the second best, according to Krell.

A story from the *Leadership Journal*³ goes: The Butterball Company set up a Thanksgiving hotline to answer questions about cooking turkeys. One woman asked if she could use a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years (imagine? 23 years. That turkey should have been married already). The Butterball expert, told her it would probably be safe if the freezer had been below zero the entire time. But the expert warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would likely have deteriorated and wouldn’t be worth eating. The woman said, “That’s what I thought. We’ll give the turkey to our church.” Ah, not good no?

² Keith Krell; available from <https://bible.org/seriespage/8-raising-cain-genesis-41-26>.

³ *Why Serious Preachers Use Humor*, LeadershipJournal.net: Monday, January 10, 2005.

While this is an amusing story (the 23+-year-old turkey), sometimes this is true for some Christians. But they are not here in this room.

The second commentary on this issue is by Heidi De Jonge says, “The New Testament gives us a more definitive analysis of Cain and Abel’s actions. “By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings” (Hebrews 11:4). “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:11-12; also using Jude 11-13). De Jonge⁴ says that in order to really wrestle with the text of Genesis, we need to pay the closest attention to what was there and that was: *The fact is that both brothers brought their best.* She continued to say that “And though we assume that Cain’s heart was somehow tainted in his giving, the text doesn’t go there. The Lord’s pleasure with Abel’s offering and displeasure with Cain’s offering has an arbitrariness that we should pay attention to.” I had to look up in the dictionary the meaning of “arbitrariness.” This word describes a course of action that is not based on reason or judgment but on personal will or discretion without regard to rules or standards.⁵ In other words, we do not really know why God did that.

The third point is: THE CONFRONTATION. It is interesting to note that before Cain killed his brother, we read, “⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?” In fact, in Gen. 4, we cannot read that God talked to Abel no? I believe that this is prevenient grace that was extended to Cain. For John Wesley, “prevenient grace” is “the grace that goes before.”⁶ I think God reached out to Cain – in fact, it looks like God counseled Cain.

⁴ Heidi De Jonge

⁵ *The Free Dictionary*, <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/arbitrariness>

⁶ *The Works of John Wesley* 1872l, cited in Leo G. Cox, “Prevenient Grace—A Wesleyan View,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 3:143-149.

Verse 7 says, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” But brothers and sisters, did Cain listen and obey? No!!! More or less like us—when we are super-duper angry—no one can stop us! We would feel like all the powers of X-Men and the Avengers combined are inside us! And we are unstoppable.

The fourth point is: THE SIN AND THE JUDGMENT. Now we go to verse 8: Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.” Abel did not have a clue that that was going to be his last day on that side of Eden. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he had no idea what awaited him in the field. What was it really that made Cain do it? I found this article that looks at the progression of Cain’s reaction:⁷ Well, this is the author’s understanding of what probably what went through Cain’s psyche. First, there was (1) **Anger- Gen. 4:5**. The literal meaning for “angry” here was it was “hot to him.” (2) then there was **Envy** – displeasure over seeing the success of another (Gen 4:4-5; Titus 3:3; Gal 5:21); then (3) there was **Hate** (well, I am doubtful of this because we cannot read that in Gen 4, but maybe there was hate that expressed itself in malice, animosity, contempt, disdain): & finally, (4) **Murder: Gen. 4:8**.

We ask, why did he murder his own brother? Perhaps we can say, “There are other constructive ways to express our anger.” Like take anger management classes, write a journal, share it to Chaplain Sherry, share it in your koinonia (what happens there, stays there), or to your spiritual mentor (like what Dr. Crocker spoke of last Tuesday). But the story goes that Cain killed Abel. Killed him talaga. Maybe he wanted to remove the competition or maybe he wanted

⁷ “The Choices of Cain,” available from <http://www.bibleanswer.com/cainchoices.htm>; accessed 21 March 2018.

to get even with God? Maybe he felt that the only way to “hurt” God was to kill the man whose offering He accepted? We are not sure.

Last January 8-May 5, 2018. I taught the course Values and Moral Development. And in this class we studied theories of moral development by Kohlberg, Piaget, Freud, the Greek philosophy on morality, social constructivism, etc. And one of the things we discussed in the class is why do people become aggressive? According to Kohlberg, “the questions we ask when we talk about values and morality are: “Why be moral?” “Why be just?” “How should we live?”

Ervin Staub of the Univ of Massachusetts, one of the authors in the textbook that we used in class says that anti-social behavior is linked to aggression and the source is often self-defense, the defense either of the physical self or the psychological self-one’s self-concept, values, and ways of life. Staub writes, (a) People who have committed criminally aggressive acts often have low self-esteem, problems of identity, wanting to prove their toughness and masculinity (b) when a person feels powerless and engages in aggression to gain a sense of efficacy.⁸ In the case of Cain, what do you think was the cause of his aggression? I think his actions somewhat sprang from his inability to have the proper self-concept in relation to God, in relation to his brother, in relation to his parents, and even to himself.

Sometimes we want to exact revenge on people who hurt us. Sometimes there are people who do not murder their enemies but they just decided to take their own lives because they cannot understand their situations anymore. I asked the permission of Dr. Aweke Tadesse Solomon, one of our PhD in HCD graduates to use a story that he had in the introduction of his dissertation (we have his dissertation in the library). On July 20, 2010 Fozia, (not her real name),

⁸ Ervin Staub, “The Roots of ProSocial and Antisocial Behavior in Persons and Groups: Environmental Influence, Personality, Culture, and Socialization,” in *Moral Development: An Introduction*, eds., William M. Kurtines and Jacob F. Gewirtz (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 440.

a 14-year-old orphaned girl committed suicide. She had been living with her grandmother in Zeway community, Ethiopia. Fozia had recently been registered for sponsorship under a certain development program. A year earlier, a close family member came to Fozia's grandmother and reported that the granddaughter was having an affair with a young man. As a compensation for the loss of virginity, the boyfriend or his family was ordered by the village elders to pay compensation to the girls' family. Thereafter the grandmother impressed on the girl that she was useless, unwanted, with no prospects of a bride price or a future. A year later, Fozia hung herself in a room.⁹ What a sad story! But that is what happens when people reach a point of no return. When they find that there is nothing to live for. No one to cover their back. This is why we are here in APNTS. We want to be equipped so we can help hurting people. We are in this caring profession. I felt so sad with the story that Dr. Crocker shared last Tuesday, how an APNTS MDiv graduate became so proud that the church cannot use him anymore.

The fifth point deals with THE CONFRONTATION AGAIN! In Gen 4, God echoed what He already asked Cain's parents, Gen. 4: 9 says, "⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, **“Where is your brother Abel?”** “I don't know,” he replied. “Am I my brother's keeper?”¹⁰ The LORD said, **“What have you done?** Then Cain lied to God. He says he does not know where his brother is. Now we know God's questions were rhetorical. God already knew what happened. Maybe God just wanted Cain to face up to his sin. But Cain said, “I don't know. “Am I my brother's keeper?”

⁹ Aweke Solomon, “The Joy And Burden Of Caring For Orphans And Vulnerable Children: A Case Study On The Wellbeing Of Primary Caregivers In Food For The Hungry, Ethiopia Child Development Program,” PhD Dissertation, APNTS (March 2018).

The word translated “keeper” really means “shepherd.”¹⁰ So, perhaps Cain was saying, “Am I the shepherd’s shepherd?” Cain forgot that he *is* his brother’s keeper. He forgot his “keeper” role as a brother. Cain was too overwhelmed by his emotions that he killed the one brother he had at the time. We also see the stories of generations down the line like that of Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Absalom and Ammon. Sibling rivalry! Family feuds, etc. I think one of the lessons of this story is about loving our brothers and sisters. Maybe we can apply this to our brothers and sisters in the dorm? Psalm 133:1 says, “How very good and pleasant it is when brothers (*and sisters*) live together in unity (Petallar brothers)! I am witness to how these brothers help one another in times of need. A perfect case study of how brothers cover each other’s backs.

The final point is THE JUDGEMENT AND GOD’S MERCY. Sin pays a wage. God did punish Cain. He must leave that side of the Garden. He must be a fugitive. He must wander, alone! But despite that punishment, our God is a beautiful God. Dr. Land, preached in Kamuning Free Methodist Church, on Gen 1. And he painted for us a God who is the Creator of everything—providing everything for human kind to thrive (the rhythm of life, the seasons); Ptra Chezzalyn Viajar, an alumna of APNTS preached on Gen 2, and she described a God who provided to Adam and Eve His very Presence as well as a Place to Grow, that is the Garden of Eden,; and Pastor Mark, my bff or best friend forever, preached on Gen 3 and he described for us a God who looked at Adam and Eve with loving eyes—remembering His image in them even after they sinned. And in Gen 4, in the story of Cain and Abel, we have a God who does not want that anyone should perish. This Sunday in Kamuning Free Methodist Church (*whisper: the only*

¹⁰ Dennis Bratcher, “God Won’t Fit in My Box: Cain and Abel,” *The Voice: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*, by the Christian Resource Institute (2013) ; available from <http://www.crivoice.org/S-gen4.html>; accessed 21 March 2018.

true church), we will already be in Gen 42. So I invite you to come to our church if you want to hear sermons from the book of Genesis.

So much about advertising my church, let us go back to Cain. When Cain pleaded before God: ¹³“My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” ¹⁵ But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. No matter how wicked Cain was, in his restless wandering, God placed a mark on him so he will be protected. The mark of guilt becomes a sign of God’s grace. I am so intrigued by this mark. Was this like the mark of “Harry Potter?” A scar on his forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt? One of the ancient rabbis argued that the sign was a dog that accompanied Cain on his wanderings. The dog assured Cain of God’s protection and frightened attackers.¹¹ The Hebrew word translated "mark" is *'owth* and refers to a “mark, sign, or token.” Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, *'owth* is used 79 times and is most frequently translated as “sign.” So, the Hebrew word does not identify the exact nature of the mark God put on Cain. Whatever it was, it was a sign/indicator that Cain was not to be killed. Was it an ugly mark? What if it was a mark of beauty? Heide De Jonge says it was certainly a “mark of grace, no matter what it looked like.”

What a unique story it is. Maybe it is too early to think about Palm Sunday or Lent. But today, I think it is good to remember Jesus’ coming into Jerusalem. We remember His Passion and Death. Because of our sins—Jesus became “sin for us.” Ephesians 1:13, NIV, “And you also

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 107.

were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were **marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit.”

We do not know whether the scars on Jesus’ hands were removed when He ascended into heaven. But interestingly, B. J. Tomas, an American Gospel singer sang, “The only man-made thing in heaven are the scars on Jesus’ hands.” Dr. Dick in one of his sermons shared with us and Dr. Land also mentioned this somewhere that death on the cross is so shameful. The people who were crucified were stripped naked, totally naked. So almost naturally, when we see someone who is naked—we tend to shift our attention to something else. And when I think about this, I remember, Isaiah 53:2-3, KJV, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is no* beauty that we should desire him. Like one from whom people hide their faces.” But Hebrews 12:2 NIV says, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we go back to Cain’s story, we really did not know whether or not Cain had served God the rest of his life in his wanderings. But the challenge lies before us: Shall we let anger rule over us? Or shall we let Jesus rule over us? Shall we fix our eyes on those who hurt us? Or shall we fix our eyes on the One who was hurt to the innermost core of His being so we will be freed from all forms of hurt? The answer is clear: we fix our eyes on Jesus!

Finally (and I mean, finally), in Genesis 4, we had witnessed a story outside of the Garden of Eden. In Luke 22:42, in another Garden, we read of the story of our Savior, saying “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Let us fix our eyes on this Savior and surrender whatever negative emotions, hardships, just all of our cares upon Him because He cares for us! Praise the Lord!

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