

Midweek Lent Homily  
Genesis 4:1-12: "Death Comes Upon the Innocent."  
February 26, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

*Behold, the Lamb!*

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Oh dearest Lord Jesus, You are the Lamb that was slain from the beginning of the world. Throughout time every sacrificial lamb has been a portrait pointing to You. Since the beginning all pious hearts have taken comfort in Your sacrifice. Oh gentle Lamb, You are my treasure, comfort, joy, and salvation. *Amen.* (Valerius Herberger, *The Great Words of God*, parts 1 & 2, p. 242)

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**Genesis 4:1-12**

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." (ESV)

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In Christ Jesus, who shed His blood in death so we guilty ones might be redeemed and live, dear fellow redeemed:

The idea of sacrifice was built into creation by God from the very beginning. After He had made the first man, He told him he could eat of every tree of the Garden of Eden except for one. He must not eat fruit from "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (Gen. 2:17). This was a sacrifice by which the man and his wife would prove their love and devotion to God. But they decided to disobey God. They did not want to make this sacrifice anymore, and they ate from the tree God had forbidden.

Their sin against God had consequences not just for them, but for all of creation. Because of their sin, now there would be death. To remind them of this death, God clothed the man and woman in animal skins (Gen. 3:21). Their sin had utterly changed their relationship to God, and it also changed their relationship to animals. Animals had been sacrificed for their clothing, and animals would now also be employed as sacrifices offered to God.

We learn this in today's reading from Genesis 4. Like his father Adam, first-born son Cain worked in the field planting and harvesting crops. But second-born son Abel kept the sheep. As far as we know, God did not sanction the eating of meat until later, after the flood (Gen. 9:3). While the sheep may have been kept for their wool, we know they were used as sacrifices for Adam and Eve's family. Our text says that *"Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions."*

But God did not receive their offerings in the same way. He *"had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard."* Why did the LORD look upon their offerings so differently? It wasn't because of the type or the quality of the products offered. The author of Hebrews says that the difference was faith. *"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts" (11:4).*

So Abel offered his sacrifice with fear, love, and trust in God. But Cain offered his sacrifice as a matter of show, as an obligation and nothing more. Why did Cain think the LORD would be satisfied with this faithless offering? Martin Luther suggests that Cain was consumed with self-importance. He was the first child ever born into the world, and hadn't God said that the woman's offspring would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15)? Cain was destined for great things, and his parents may have even told him so. But there was nothing special about Abel. Abel was the second-born, second place. He was sent to work with the sheep while Adam and Cain presumably worked in the field side-by-side.

So when God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's, *"Cain was very angry, and his face fell."* The LORD called him to repent, and He warned him saying, *"sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."* The LORD told him not to open the door to jealous anger and hatred. That's where sin was crouching, lying in wait to overcome him. This reminds us of the Apostle Peter's words about how the devil works, *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1Pe. 5:8).* The devil tempts us to sin against one another, to think highly of ourselves and to look down at others.

Each of us here has opened the door to sin like Cain did. We have felt intense anger and hatred toward those around us, sometimes even the members of our own family. We have justified this anger by dwelling on the wrongs that have been done. We convince ourselves that because of a person's sin against us or against others, they do not deserve our mercy or our love. They deserve to suffer. They deserve punishment. At the same time, we consider ourselves righteous. We would never do the things they do.

But in our anger and hatred toward someone because of their sin, we also sin. 1 John 3:15 says, *"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer."* Even our hateful thoughts violate the Fifth Commandment. And if we do not *"rule over"* these thoughts as God urged Cain to do, the devil will use them to tempt us toward sins of word and action. That is what happened to Cain. He did not repent of his sin. He did not close the door to temptation. He let his anger lead to violence toward his brother, and he killed him.

God approved of the sacrifice of animals for offerings to Him. But He did not approve of the murder of men. Abel did not have to die. He was an innocent victim. Cain was the lawbreaker.

He let sin rule over him, and in unbelief he rejected the LORD's command and promise. *"What have you done?"* said the LORD. *"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground.... You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*

We sin in many of the same ways that Cain did. Like Cain we have also gone through the motions of righteousness toward God. We have offered prayers without thinking about them and expected God to be gracious even when we had no sincere intention to repent and amend our sinful ways. We justified our anger and unkindness toward others while avoiding any personal responsibility.

But the LORD has mercifully kept us from being overcome by sin and losing our faith. He has brought us back here today to repent of our sins and receive His forgiveness. Through His holy Word, He points us to Jesus, whose righteousness covers us like the garments God made for Adam and Eve, and who saved us by His innocent suffering and death. Because Jesus shed His precious blood for us, we are forgiven and cleansed of all our sins. He was the sacrifice required for our salvation, the sacrifice which Abel looked for in faith, and by which he was delivered from death to life just as we will be.

So once again today we humbly offer our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for God's great love for us, and we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who gave Himself for us. *"Abel's blood for vengeance / Pleaded to the skies; / But the blood of Jesus / For our pardon cries"* (ELH 283, v. 4). Thanks be to God! *Amen.*

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