

October 23, 2016
Genesis 4:1-15

Proper 25C
The Firstborn of God

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Bliss of Eden was already shattered. He should have been the one. He was the firstborn after all. He had it all going for him. In the Bible, typically it's the firstborn who received the blessing and the promise. His offering should have been accepted. After all, he had the belief, that because he was the firstborn that it would be accepted...and his brother...accepted, but not as much as his.

When did this sacrificial system start? Why are Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to the Lord? My thought, but we aren't told, is that after God made the first sacrifice and covered Adam and Eve with skin of an animal, the practice took. Aren't we told elsewhere in the Scripture that a sacrifice is needed to atone for sin? Perhaps this is what is going on here. Perhaps it's also a thank offering for the fruits of the earth? Whichever it is, it doesn't matter. What matters is the fact that they were offering their gifts to God.

Adam and Eve as parents probably taught their children about giving back to God your first and your very best. I'm sure on this day when Cain and Abel brought their gifts, that maybe they both did bring their best and first. But Scripture only says that Abel brought the first...not Cain. Something was different between the two. It wasn't the fact that Abel brought a lamb and Cain brought his grain. It was what lies in the heart of Cain and Abel. The Offering of Abel was accepted and the Offering of Cain was rejected.

Cain was angry. Wouldn't you be? Cain's offering was rejected. But why? It was because of the fact that Cain had faith in himself and Abel had faith in God, he had faith in the promise. Cain the firstborn, it should have been him, but it wasn't. His heart wasn't in the right place. You see whenever an offering is made of any kind, God will look at the heart first, and then at the gift. In my devotions this week I read the story of the widow's mite. She gave from her heart all she had to live on, but those that were rich, gave out of their abundance. The hearts of the rich people weren't in the right place.

Cain's heart was not in the right place. His heart was not for God. He was jealous of his brother. He was "shown up" by his brother, he thinks. His pride took a hit...after all he was the firstborn. With his anger at his brother, he hated him...and already had murdered him. It was all about Cain, not about God. Cain's god was himself. Therefore Cain's offering was counted evil by God. In Romans Paul writes, "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

Cain's heart is the wrong place, but God gives him a chance. Martin Luther pictures the conversation happening between Adam and Cain. As Adam is speaking in the stead of God. God is warning Cain of his misplaced anger, his unjust anger and warns Cain that sin is

crouching at the door of his heart. God gives Cain a chance to repent, but Cain with his heart trusting only in himself rejects God and His admonition.

There's no repentance, so sin is right around the corner...and for Cain he acts on it. He brings his brother out into the field, away from his parents and sisters and he commits the world's first premeditated murder. After this there is another confrontation between Cain and God (or Adam and Cain) where God asks Cain where is Abel, but Cain again does not repent...but is only concerned for his safety. He again was probably thinking...indeed my brother is dead, I will ultimately be accepted...there's no other...and then he's thinking when he hears the consequences...one of my sisters might avenge my death.

Cain isn't the only firstborn to disappoint his parents. Adam did it first! Then there was Esau who sold his birthright. There was the nation of Israel who was the firstborn chosen of God, but yet failed her Father. Adam, Cain, Esau, and Israel – trusted only in themselves. They trusted in the fact that there the “firstborn.” Their hearts were in the wrong place. And so our yours. You by nature look only out for yourself. Whether it be your income, your families, your education, your athletics. You try and take over your life, proving to everyone that your heart is not in the right place. You are just like the firstborn who reject the promise.

So God would go elsewhere...he would look elsewhere. He gave the blessing to Seth, after Abel was murdered and Cain was lost, HE gave the blessing to Jacob, and then ultimately the blessing would go through the seed of the woman, the true Israel, the true firstborn Son of God...Jesus Christ.

Blood was shed in our text for today, this blood that was shed cried out in vengeance. Our text says, “The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.” It's crying for vengeance and rightfully so. There's more blood in our text, a better blood one could say. Before Abel's blood was shed in murder. Before Abel was killed because he found favor with God, the blood of a lamb was sacrificed. The blood of a firstborn lamb was shed as a thank offering or as a sin offering. Whatever that sacrifice and offering it was it was pleasing to the Lord.

Abel's innocent blood cried out for vengeance, whereas the blood of another, the blood of The Father's true firstborn...the firstborn Lamb of God cried out in pardon. It's as the hymn writer says, “Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies, but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.” The Blood of Jesus is shed for you for your pardon.

Christ Jesus, the true firstborn Son of God, was murdered by people who thought only of themselves. Christ Jesus was murdered by selfish people whose hearts were not right with God. Christ Jesus through your sin and mine was killed with premeditated murder. They took him outside to a hill and killed him. The blood of Christ Jesus dripped down from his body to the ground and it cries out, not with vengeance but with pardon. The blood Jesus wasn't just shed because he was murdered, but because the Father sacrificed His Son as the final sacrifice for all time. It's the sacrifice that brings you back to the Father.

The blood of Christ, utters the very words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The Blood of Christ is shed for you for your forgiveness. It cries for your pardon. It cries for the Father to see not a heart of sin, but a heart that is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus cleanses your heart. It removes the dirt, the dust, the grime of sin from your heart. It turns your heart from a heart of selfish desires to a heart of faith.

Your heart was cleansed at your baptism; by his blood you are made white as snow. Your heart is continually cleansed by blood, by blood that you drink when you kneel at the Lord's Table. Your heart is cleansed when you receive into your mouth the blood of Jesus, the firstborn, for your forgiveness.

With great joy, we thank for the blood that cries for our pardon, and an ear that hears that cry and grants our pardon. With great joy we look forward to the time that the shattered bliss of Eden will be undone. We look forward with joy to a day when we will one day live in paradise restored, in the bliss of Eden again.

But until that as we sang in our hymn: Gone the bliss of Eden's garden, Gone the age of sacrifice; ours the time of grace and favor, ours the call to paradise! Even, Lord, impress upon us: Only You can cover sin—Take our worthless, self-made garments, Clothe our shame and cleanse within.

Only the blood of Jesus can cover your sin. Only Jesus can cleanse your selfish hearts. Only Jesus can bring you to heart of faith. He can do this, because his final sacrifice was accepted and honored before God. This was shown when God raised Him from the dead and exalted him for you. In exaltation that you will one day receive when you are raised in glory.

Only by the innocent blood of the firstborn and only Son of God, Jesus that cries for pardon can empower your hearts to be a heart of faith. A heart that resembles Abel, as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

This familiar story is heard quite frequently in Sunday School as a story of hatred and murder and the lack of guilt. Today you heard the story in a different way, by looking at the fact that Cain's heart was selfish and did not believe in the promise, and thought himself highly because He was the firstborn. His heart of selfishness and lack of repentance led to his sin mounting in numerous ways and ultimately ended in a life of misery. You also heard how the blood that was shed by Abel and the lamb is a precursor to the ultimate blood shed by Jesus and cries for your pardon. Thank God for that innocent blood of the firstborn, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, which then cleanses your heart and turns it to be a heart of faith as you trust in the promises of God.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.