

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
Lent Series 2012: *Stunning Sins and Vast Forgivenesses*  
3/7/2012, Midweek Lent 2  
Cain and Abel: Genesis 4:1-16

PRAYER OF THE DAY (Lent 2)

P Eternal God, it is your glory always to have mercy. Bring back all who have erred and strayed from your ways; lead them again to embrace in faith the truth of your Word and to hold it fast; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

*[Note from Pastor Fryer: These three Bible readings all speak of blood that cries out to heaven -- sometimes calling for justice, finally calling for mercy.]*

FIRST LESSON..... Genesis 4:1-16, KJV

<sup>1</sup>And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. <sup>2</sup>And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup>And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. <sup>4</sup>And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: <sup>5</sup>But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. <sup>8</sup>And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. <sup>9</sup>And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? <sup>10</sup>And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. <sup>11</sup>And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; <sup>12</sup>When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. <sup>13</sup>And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup>Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. <sup>15</sup>And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. <sup>16</sup>And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.



<sup>8</sup>And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (Genesis 3:8-9, KJV)

Futile it was to hide from the Lord, for there is no outrunning him:

<sup>7</sup>Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? <sup>8</sup>If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. <sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; <sup>10</sup>Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-11, KJV)

Indeed, doubly futile is it to try to hide from the Lord, for not only can it *not be done*, but also, we should not *want* it to be done, for then we are lost. In the end, the whole key to our destiny is that we not flee from the Lord, but seek after him and draw near to him:

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!  
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be nearer, my God, to Thee,  
*Chorus:* Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!  
(19th century Christian hymn by Sarah Flower Adams<sup>1</sup>)

So, they did this thing: they hid from the Lord. Next, when the LORD questioned them about eating from the tree, Adam threw his wife under the bus by suggesting that she was the one to blame for his sin. How much sorrow there is on earth from husbands and wives betraying one another.

Then Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden and forced to live in a world East of Eden, where the ground is contrary, with thistles and thorns and weeds, and where we have to make our living by the sweat of our brow.

And now this: Cain murders his brother, Abel. How quickly things have moved from eating of a forbidden tree to heartless murder.

## THE CRUSHER

Last week we took some comfort in the promise made to Adam and Eve that though they had sinned, still one of their descendents would defeat Satan and set things back on track. The LORD condemns the devil and promises One who will bruise the head of the serpent:

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nearer,\\_My\\_God,\\_to\\_Thee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nearer,_My_God,_to_Thee)

<sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15, KJV)

Martin Luther observed that it would be entirely natural for Eve to hope that her first born son would be this promised one -- the one who could get things back on track with the Lord. Luther uses a fun word to make his point. He speaks the “Crusher,” with a capital “C”:

When Eve had given birth to her first-born son, she hoped that she already had that Crusher.

But, alas, that did not work out, now did it? For Eve’s first-born son turned out not to be the Crusher, but a murderer! Cain murdered his brother, Abel.

## **WRATH**

He had been warned against it. The LORD himself had warned Cain about the power of wrath:

<sup>4</sup>... And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:4-7, RSV)

This is a saying of entire honesty. It is both law and gospel, each intensely worded. The law is that “sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you.” And the gospel is “but you must master it.” Perhaps this is more gospel than we want. I hope you are a peaceful-minded people never afire with anger. But if you should ever fall into anger, so that you are ablaze with wrath, then remember this saying of our Lord, “but you must master it.” The reason this is “gospel” is that it means you that *can* master your anger. Our God has not so abandoned the human race that we have become monsters with no ability to master our emotions. No, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the sure sign that the Blessed Trinity has not given up on us. We retain the freedom to master our anger. If we will, we can calm ourselves down. We do not need to hit with wicked fist. We do not need to slash and burn our opponent. We do not need to walk in the path of Cain of old.

This is much emphasized in the New Testament. Both Jesus and St. Paul urge us to master our anger. And so it is that early on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks for purity of heart that surrenders anger:

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup>So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:21-24, RSV)

Likewise with St. Paul. He knows that we are human beings subject to getting angry. But he asks us to master that anger:

<sup>26</sup>Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: <sup>27</sup>Neither give place to the devil... <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: <sup>32</sup>And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32, KJV)

Though Cain had a good Preacher appealing to him to calm his wrath -- that is, though the LORD himself exhorted Cain toward peace -- Cain refused, to the heartbreak of his mother and father and to the death of his own brother. The LORD God had alerted Cain that he was on the verge of great wickedness. “Sin lieth at the door, Cain. Sin is crouching, hungry to get you. You can still master him.” But Cain rejected the pleading of God. When he got his brother alone in the open country, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. The spilt blood of Abel, then, cried to heaven against Cain. And in virtue of that crying blood, Cain was punished, almost beyond his ability to bear it.

## **BUT NOT THE BLOOD OF CALVARY**

But, as a kind of foretaste of the Gospel to come, mercy was shown to this murderer, Cain. When the man was close to despair, the Lord showed mercy on him:

<sup>13</sup>And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. (Genesis 4:13, KJV)

Murder is a great sin. The mind reels to think of things worse than murder. The murderer trifles with God’s own creation. Life belongs to God. It is precious in his sight. But the murderer casts aside the claims of the Creator and does harm that goes beyond his undoing, for the life is gone and the murderer cannot restore it.

But for all that, the Lord showed mercy on Cain. The Lord protects Cain with a mark:

And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (Genesis 4:15, KJV)

Poor Abel's spilt blood cried out to heaven against Cain, yet the Lord did not utterly destroy Cain. This is an anticipation of that precious blood splattered on the Cross -- a blood that cries out not for human destruction, but for our salvation.

The blood spilt and soaking into the ground of Calvary does not condemn us. That divine blood that fell and stained the cross and the ground does not cry out against us.

We sang of that mercy just a few minutes ago, in the hymn "Glory Be to Jesus" (LBW 95):

Abel's blood for vengeance  
Pleaded to the skies;  
But the blood of Jesus  
For our pardon cries.

The New Testament puts the point like this:

[We are come] to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Indeed it does speak of "better things." It speaks of the salvation of the sinner on account of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus given for us.

## **AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?**

Let me end by lingering a bit with Cain's cold-hearted question: Am I my brother's keeper? Yes, Cain, you are.

Brothers should not kill brothers. In the Civil War, brothers fought on opposite sides, and I suppose that if they ever faced one another on the battle field, they charged one another with conviction as they would with facing any other enemy. In this sad world, brothers might end up facing brothers in street gangs. But it is a hard thing to think about. What a rendering of the bonds of childhood! This brother, this sister you grew up with: Have things really reached a state where you would contemplate killing that one?

And who is my brother? Who is my sister? It is a beautiful thing, you know, that the Bible begins with the story of Adam and Eve, for one implication of that story is that we are all kin. We all spring for the same mother and father. We share a common humanity, and John Donne's saying remains true, "Any man's death diminishes me."

Finally, tremble not only before murder of the body, but also before murder of the soul. Beware of soul-murderer. Do not be the one to lead others astray. Do not lead them to the red-light district, not to the drug dealer, not so many ways in which we can degrade one another. Why? Because our brother is one for whom our Lord died and for whom he lives again. I mean Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.