

Dec. 4, 2022

The Second Sunday in Advent

The Lessons:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-7

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

The Hymns:

342 *What Hope! An Eden Prophesied*

572 *In The Shattered Bliss of Eden*

347 *Comfort, Comfort Ye My People*

The Collect:

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:

“This Is My Son, Cain”

Genesis 4:1-16

4 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten¹ a man with the help of the Lord.” **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of ^uthe fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of ^vthe firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord ^whad regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but ^xfor Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** ^yIf you do well, will you not be accepted?² And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. ^zIts desire is contrary to³ you, but you must rule over it.”

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother.⁴ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and ^akilled him. **9** Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, ^b“I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” **10** And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood ^cis crying to me from the ground. **11** And now ^dyou are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. **12** 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.” **13** Cain said to the Lord, “My ^epunishment is greater than I can bear.⁵ **14** Behold, ^fyou have driven me today away from the ground, and ^gfrom your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, ^hand whoever finds me will kill me.” **15** Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him ⁱsevenfold.” And the Lord ^jput a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. **16** Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod,⁶ east of Eden.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

When parents find out that they are expecting a child, many more hopes and expectations come along with that discovery. Parents begin dreaming about what their child will be like. They wonder what he or she will accomplish. They hope for the best. Every parent wants to be able to point out their child at any stage in their life and proudly introduce them by saying “This is my son” or “This is my daughter.”

But every parent has to face inevitable disappointment as well. Our children will not live up to every expectation we have of them. The dad who places a tiny basketball in his son’s crib may end up with a son who is not interested in basketball. The mom who prays nightly for her teenage daughter and tries to raise her right may still end up getting a phone call saying that her daughter has gotten into some trouble.

Life with children does not go as we plan or hope.

Today we are beginning a series of sermons for Advent that will look at three father-son relationships found in the Old Testament. These stories will explore the hopes and expectations that the fathers had for their sons but will especially look at the disappointment that each father faced as his son failed to meet expectations. Ultimately, each sermon will end by looking at the perfect Father-and-Son relationship: the one shared by our heavenly Father and His only begotten Son upon whom God smiled and said, “This is My Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

We begin our series by looking at perhaps the most disappointing son in the history of mankind— the son of Adam, Cain.

Adam and Eve had high hopes for Cain. This was evident not only by his name but also by what Eve, his mother, says about him. In the translation we use, Eve says, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” However, some scholars, including Martin Luther, have understood Eve to say, “I have gotten the man of the Lord.”

What this could very well mean is that Eve thought that Cain was the promised Seed of Genesis 3:15 who would crush the serpent’s head and bring salvation from Adam and Eve’s sin. The name Cain comes from the Hebrew word meaning “to possess” or “to acquire.” Martin Luther puts himself into Eve’s head and imagines her thinking like this: “I remember what we have lost through sin. But now let our hope and speech be of nothing else except winning this back and keeping possession of it. For I have gotten the man of God who will obtain that lost glory for us again.”

Now those are some high expectations! Contrast that to his brother, Abel, who gets no such welcome from his mother and whose name means “vanity” and implies something that is worthless or cast aside. The names of these two brothers reveal the hopes and expectations of their parents. But Adam and Eve were only setting themselves up for more disappointment. Cain was no savior.

Perhaps it was the lofty expectations placed on him that gave Cain his selfish pride that is revealed later in the story. More than likely, however, his selfish pride was simply a result of the sin that had been passed down to him from his parents. Whatever the reason, it is made clear in Hebrews 11 that Abel possessed true faith in God and received His favor while Cain’s offerings were rejected because his heart did not belong to God.

Envy and anger filled Cain's heart and mind, ready to devour him like an animal crouching and waiting to attack its unsuspecting victim. Cain is warned by God to resist sin and to repent, but instead, when sin pounces, Cain gives in and pounces upon his unsuspecting brother, taking his life and becoming the first murderer.

Can you imagine the pain and disappointment of Adam and Eve when they find out what Cain has done? The son they thought would save their lives instead became a taker of life. They had to come to grips that the curse of their original sin had been passed down to their own children. And it continued to be passed down to their grandchildren, and to their great-grandchildren, through every generation up to and including our own.

"By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners," Romans 5:19 tells us. We are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, and we have inherited the same inclination to sin that lurked in the heart of Cain. And as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 5, we are all as guilty of murder as Cain. Everyone who becomes angry with his or her brother is liable to the judgment of murder. Anyone who insults his brother or says to anyone "You fool!" will face the same condemnation that Cain did: exile from God.

When it comes to keeping God's commandments, we have all been huge disappointments. Our offerings to God have not always been made with hearts full of faith and joy but out of grudging compulsion. We have harbored anger and envy in our hearts toward others. We have imagined that we are not our brother's keeper, not responsible for the well-being of others, more concerned with ourselves. As children of God, we have fallen well short of expectations.

This is why the writer of Psalm 146 instructs us: "Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish."

Adam and Eve were wrong about Cain being the promised Seed. But God's plan was still intact. The Savior would indeed be a son of Adam—true man—but would also be the Son of God.

Into our world of hatred and murder was born our God of love and life. From the moment Jesus was a little child, the spiritual heirs of Cain sought to take His life. Because He lived His life as a perfect offering to God, others grew envious and angry toward Him. Eventually, they succeeded in spilling His blood. Two Lenten songs bring the story of Cain and the story of Jesus together.

"A murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay" (My Song Is Love Unknown, LSB 430:5). For Cain and for all murderers since him, including you and me, the Lord and giver of life is murdered so that we might be given life.

"Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies; but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries." (Glory Be to Jesus, LSB 433:4). "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground," God tells Cain. The blood of Abel cried out for justice for himself. But Hebrews 12 tells us that Jesus' blood cries out not for Himself but on behalf of the whole world. "You have come . . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22a, 24). Jesus became our murdered brother so that He might keep us from everlasting death.

Jesus is the true Son of Adam whose shed blood and broken body are the perfect sacrifice accepted by God the Father to wash clean our murderous hearts and make us children of God. "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man (Adam), much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

Because of Jesus, our perfect brother, your heavenly Father is not disappointed in you. Instead, through your Baptism, He looks down upon you with approval and love and says proudly: "This is My son or daughter, with whom I am well pleased." In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.