

29 July 2012

Reading: Genesis 4:1-16 (OT page 6)

MP 469 My faith looks up to Thee

Sermon

The text for the sermon: ⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Can you imagine the media frenzy if this happened in our day? Can you imagine how sensational the media would have reported on the murder of Abel? Maybe the headlines would have said: "Jealousy leads to murder"!

It seems Cain's jealousy was sparked by God's rejection of his offering while accepting of Abel's offering. Was this enough to make him so angry and murder his own brother? Was God really fair?

But unlike any news article lets investigate the facts and start at the beginning...

In the Old Testament times names meant a lot. Cain was the first born and his name in this context meant "to acquire or create". Abel was the second born and his name meant "breath" suggesting that he would

always be only the second child, not so important as his brother. Cain looked after the soil like his father Adam and Abel after the sheep.

Both of them made offerings to the Lord. The text suggests that Cain took some of the fruit of the land while Abel offered the “firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” as it literally says in the text. Perhaps Abel brought the best parts of his flocks while Cain was not so particular. But sacrifice is only acceptable to God if it is perfect and costly. God will not be satisfied with the second best. So God did not regard the offering of Cain while He favoured the offering of Abel. God was fair!

So Cain was angry with God. God saw that he was angry and tried to persuade him not to do something irrational and wrong. God told him if he did right, he will be accepted but when he makes the wrong choice sin will take over. But Cain was only listening to his own anger. He took Abel to the field and murdered him.

After his murder God spoke again to Cain and asked him where his brother was. Cain tried to hide the murder from God but then had to realise that it was already known. So God condemned his action and said “because the earth have opened her mouth to receive the blood of

his brother, the earth will not yield its fruit to him". He will become a restless wanderer on earth.

Cain then responded saying that he accepts his punishment although it is more than he can bear – he will be driven from the land, he will not find favour in God's eyes and people will kill him. But then God said in an act of mercy: No – it is only Him that decided over life and death. Whoever tries to kill him will be punished sevenfold. And to commemorate it God gave him a mark so that everyone would know not to kill him!

Our reading ends with a tragic note. Cain went away from the presence of God.

So what on earth is the writer trying to tell us?

Our reading is all about sin – its definition and its consequences. Sin happens every time humans do not listen to God. Sin is not necessarily things like liquor, sex and dancing. And then when we do not listen to God or his words, and follow our own ways, afterwards we usually feel guilty and without any confidence to speak to God. I once said to a fellow student in the hostel where I stayed: you can do whatever you

like as long as you can tell God about it afterwards with a clear conscience! He then said: well then I can go and drink all night or do even worse things. I said yes, if you are able to speak to God before you go to bed. He off course could not answer me.

Cain was jealous of his brother and God knew what was going on in his heart and mind. Even when God was warning him not to do what he planned, he did not listen. WE CAN compare it to a football match where the players continues to play even after the final whistle was blown. Nothing good can come from this type of behaviour and in Cain's case it didn't. He continues to feed his anger by murdering his brother. And then as it usually happens with sin, he tried to hide from God.

But God knows all sin and in Cain's case – he had to face the consequences. Cain accepted his sin and God showed mercy by keeping his hand over the life of Cain.

The author wants to emphasise that sin brings a divide between God and humans and between people.

In our case our lives was looking as dim as Cain's. But God had pity on us like He had on Cain. He knew that no human being can ever please him and do what He wants. He decided to send his only Son to make right what no human being could ever achieve. He changed the destiny of every believer forever and ever. He died for the sins of people like Cain, like you and me. He even overpowered death so that we can have the living hope to be with God in His kingdom when our eyes are finally closed. God took away all our sins and he also gave us a sign namely of baptism and Holy Communion. Whenever we baptise and take part in Holy Communion we are assured of God's mercy, love and grace.

God's love always conquers all – even despite the sin of his children like in the case of Cain. God looks at the believers with eyes of compassion, mercy and love. It is as though God is looking through glasses of Calvary and an empty tomb.

If you feel guilty for something terrible that you did, today is the day to bring it before God to ask his forgiveness. Speak to God and tell him what is really going on in your life and believing. Do not do what Cain did by hiding from God because there is no hiding from Him.

If you sitting in the church and feel that you are too much of a sinner to be ever close to God or that your past is too grim to even speak to God, think again. If you think that you are not worthy to be in His presence or to come to church on a regular basis, remember whom we are serving. We do not serve a wrathful unforgiving God. We serve a Lord whom not only is in control of heaven and earth but who was willing to die for the sake of his children.

Love lifted us from sin, darkness and hell. So let us all lift up our heads and open our ears – God did deliver us from sin. He took away everything that divided Him from us.

May God help us never to judge others and may we sing this hymn again and again in the coming week:

I was sinking deep in sin,
Sinking to rise no more
Overwhelmed by guilt within
Mercy I did implore
Then the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
Christ my saviour lifted me
now safe am I because love lifted me, when no one else could help,
love lifted me...

Amen