

Read also Ephesians 4:21 - 5:2

Someone visited my office recently who was full of questions about the Bible. Having been told by a Christian friend never to question the Bible, this person wondered if questioning was okay. When you read this story, it raises all kinds of questions. I believe God wants us to question. Yet the best way to question is from a stance of faith, that is, a desire to discover God.

Today's text generates so many questions we are going to take two weeks to study the passage. Let's read it. READ Genesis 4:1-7

What questions does this story raise for you? Here are some questions:

- What made these brothers want to bring a sacrifice and worship God?
- What was wrong with Cain's offering?
- How did Cain know God was displeased?
- Where's the good news in this story?

There are more questions but that is enough for now.

These are the very first human beings born on the earth. Cain's name means "to get, to create." His name alone means Adam and Eve were delighted. They celebrated the gift of God. The name means they praised God.

Remember the first characteristic of God – God gives pleasure.

Cain's name means they worshiped God because they were delighted with God.

The boys grew up. We have no details in this story, other than their occupations. They followed in their father's footsteps, caring for animals and farming.

Then on day they brought God an offering. Again, this is natural; innate in humans. People have come to me and said, "I want to contribute to something significant for God." The desire to bring a sacrifice to God is an utterly natural, instinctive, and spontaneous expression of the spirit. We are religious people.

But, we can corrupt our offerings.

Have you ever had good intentions and by the time you get there you change your mind?

Have you ever made a commitment on the phone to give to a non-profit organization but then when the envelope arrives into which you are to put your check, you just never quite send it?

Have you ever made a vow – I'm going to give the whole thing to God. But then something comes up and you back out of it thinking it doesn't really matter.

I mean, it was a nice thought, but your intentions and actions don't quite line up. I've been there. Perhaps that was where Cain was.

This is called “corrupting the emotions.” You can have pure and noble intentions but they can be corrupted when you don’t follow through.

The text tells us Cain simply “brought from the fruit of the soil.” But Abel brought “the choicest of the firstlings of his flock.” Therefore Abel demonstrated a quality of the heart and mind which Cain did not have.

The New Testament says “Abel had faith.” (Hebrews 11:4) Abel’s act of worship was an ungrudging, open-hearted, concentrated devotion.

Our skit showed that Cain’s intentions were corrupted. He wasn’t really focused on the spiritual side of things. He was concerned with himself. His good intentions turned into “why should I have to prove my worth?”

Dr. Laurelei asked him a very appropriate question: “Should God just accept your disregard and disrespect?”

Worshipping God is important. Your heart being in it makes a difference.

Do you put your heart into worship? Or do you keep your feelings to yourself?

Part of the mission of FPCD is “connecting with God.” One way to do this is to offer something to God from the heart.

That means reverence matters. Respect for God matters.

It means when we come to the time of offering, fulfillment of religious obligations is important. We are expected to give. We are to give until we feel it. This text teaches that.

This story also shows us a very wonderful thing about God. God personally interacts with each one of us –just as he did with Cain. Cain failed. Did God reject him? No! God cared enough to confront him.

God noticed he was upset about his offering being rejected. So God took the time to talk it through. God asked, “Why are you distressed and why is your face fallen?”

See how close God is to the humans He loves?

He sees how you feel.

God gave a solution to Cain’s anger and depression.

Do the right thing and there will be uplift. That means, it will lift your spirits and take away your discouragement.

Have you ever thought that worship and sacrifice for God might bring you healing?

Try it. When you are really angry about something you saw on T.V., turn off the television and put on a Christian CD and sing. See if it calms and lifts your spirits.

When you are down, do something special for someone. When things discourage you, make a special offering to God. Make a big deal about it.

God wanted to help Cain overcome his distress. God is like that –the New Testament is full of help for overcoming things that might hurt us – sins that we fall into – encouraging us that God will help us.

God described anger and disappointment like this – living in it, mulling it over and over –is like a demon crouching at your door; like a hungry lion ready to leap. Sin is not just something bad that you do but an aggressive force ready to ambush you.

Sometimes we need help from excellent Christian counselors and medical doctors. Do not hesitate to get help if you suffer from depression. But this anger Cain felt was not clinical, nor was it a medical condition. It was specific to a situation; he got mad and jealous and let his anger control him.

As Paul says in Ephesians, “be angry, but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

Anger that we let escalate becomes sin and sin takes on a life of its own. Paul says that. “I do what I don’t want to do and don’t do what I want to do” (Ro 7:17).

Many of us have been in that trap. What do we do? Is the situation impossible?

No. God gives the best news imaginable: “You can resist it – and win!”

John Steinbeck, the famous Nobel Prize author wrote what he considered his finest work about this story of Cain and Abel in his book, *East of Eden*. The reason Mr. Steinbeck was so impressed with this story is that God gave Cain advice that empowered him to change.

Steinbeck saw in this text an invitation, a challenge, and a promise. He saw it as a promise that God would help Cain conquer sin.

Steinbeck writes: “It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, ‘I couldn’t help it; the way was set.’ But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man.”¹ And I would add: that makes a woman a woman, too.

Paul in the book of Philippians advises us like this, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God at work within you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

¹John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 301.

This story tells us God has truly endowed us with the moral power to control the sins that we often feel control us, sins like anger, resentment, and negative thought. Think of the freedom when we know we are empowered to overcome temptation through an act of the will.

When you do make the decision to overcome sin in your life, know with assurance that God will help you, and that you can win the victory.

AMEN