

*Read also 1 John 3:11-18*

I'm not sure I even know what murder is. Most of us have not experienced it close up. Yet you might understand the shock of it. My husband loves a particular grocery store near our home. I hate to go there because a couple of years ago a woman met an elderly man there, whom she knew quite well – that's the last time she was seen alive. Months later her body was found, he having murdered her. I had met her. She was the mother of one of my son's friends.

The murder shocked my little community.

I suppose had you lived at the time of Cain and Abel, you would have been even more shocked by the murder. You can be sure that it was not premeditated - there had never been a death before.

We may not have experienced murder close-up but we certainly know what it is to disagree so strongly with someone we cannot even be in the same room with them.

Jesus said that is where murder starts, when we so disdain someone we want to insult them, or call them fool or idiot. Certainly if we are honest, we have done that, or at least thought of it.

So maybe there is a little piece of murder we have experienced.

The New Testament interprets Cain's murder of Abel. The apostle John in his first epistle says Cain gave himself over to the evil one.

If you remember from last week, God had told Cain he must fight the anger or it would overcome him. But he didn't. Instead, one day he lured Abel into the field and took his life away. Sin is devastating, and the world, then and now, feels the consequence of sin.

Many years later God would give the law through Moses, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

God would say, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

So we have this God who intrudes. Our God intervenes in our affairs; He cares about how humans treat one another. We believe in a God who won't let us alone. God gets in your business; ferreting out attitudes that you may have.

He does this because he understands the consequence of sin, and God has opinions about how we should live to avoid falling into those sins. God knows we are a lot closer to murder than we realize. He tells Cain, "You are your brother's keeper."

Can you see this as a good thing? Or do you question whether anyone owes God anything? What do you think? Is it good for God to hold us to standards of right and wrong?

Let's listen to some of those God opinions as John writes about this story. READ 1 John 3:11-18.

First, John says we've heard this message from the beginning – yes, from the very first chapters of the Bible God has been quite clear about this: we should love one another.

So what does love look like? The Bible quite clearly tells us when Cain chose to ignore God he aligned himself with the evil one.

Catch a picture of Satan. He acts perniciously, that is the evil one causes insidious harm or ruin. Instead of dealing with the challenge God gave him, Cain sought to eliminate the problem.

But Jesus said instead of eliminating the problem, go the extra mile.

That's hard to stomach. Who wants to do that? That seems impossible! That's what Cain thought.

Jesus goes so far as to say, if you are going to church and you realize you have something against your brother or someone has something against you, DROP your offering and go quickly to that person and make up.

The anger that can build up inside is so corrupting that Jesus wants us to learn to unload it in the right way.

Are you taking His advice? It can be very good advice which results in great freedom.

His advice is only hard in one area: it causes us to eat humble pie. We resist eating it – even for God.

I don't know why we have such a problem with it; but I think it is a universal problem.

What if Cain had simply said, *okay, I'll make a change next time. Maybe Abel is right.*

That's challenging, yes. We resist it; but aren't you glad the Bible says, *go on, love your brother. The world – and your life – will be a better place.*

When I come to these challenging passages and I have to say something like that to you, often it is hard. In fact, I have a confession to make. I hate to read to you those parts of the Bible that confront these issues, like:

“He does not let the guilty go unpunished” (Ex 34:7).

But that is exactly the message of this passage.

Perhaps that is a comfort to those of you who struggle with so much evil in the world. Some of you would desire that God would punish more, and indeed, Paul tells us,

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

No, Paul says, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19).

Cain did not do that, and indeed, Cain was punished for his crime.

He was put on trial just like his parents were when they broke God's command about the apple. Notice that Cain, the murderer, the one who wouldn't follow God's good instruction responded with fear that he would be murdered.

And, Cain deserved death.

"An eye for an eye."

But God spared his life and sent him on his way – even giving him a mark of protection. How does that mercy strike you?

God defines Himself as

"The LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Ex 34:6-7).

No matter what you do, if you turn to God, God is merciful. God allows a way out so mercy touches your life. At all times God makes His sun rise on both the good and the evil.

I asked you at the beginning, do you appreciate God's instructions?

The man who murdered my son's friend's mother? He had lied to her, saying he was rich and he would give her a job at a company he did not own. Instead of humbly admitting his failure, he killed her. Now he is in prison, probably fearing the abuse of other inmates.

Are you angry with your brother, sister, parent, or friend?

Now go out there and take this story to heart. Follow the advice of God. God lets the world feel the effects of sin. We have knowledge of both good and evil. We can choose to be different, with God's help. If you do, you will come out being fully and blessedly free.

AMEN