

“Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”

Sermon for the 13th Sunday

Sermon Text: Genesis 4:1-16



Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten 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 the fruit of the ground,⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵ but for 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 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “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 is crying to me from the ground.¹¹ And now you 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 punishment is greater than I can bear.¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and 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 sevenfold.” And the Lord put 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, east of Eden.

The pictures that are coming from Afghanistan are shocking and have engraved themselves in our memory. Menacing Taliban soldiers on the one side and a tall wall with barbed wire on the other side. Thousands are in between. People are squished against this wall in the heat of the day and are dying. A mother hands her child over the barbed wire fence to a foreign soldier. She will perhaps never see the child again. What kind of hopelessness and desperation drives a mother to give up her own child? The question is, how long will this all last? Without a doubt, the last planes with refugees will leave Kabul’s airport at some point. And then the new Taliban daily life in Afghanistan will begin. Information from Afghanistan will become less and less. It won’t be interesting anymore what happens in Kabul or in the small villages all over Afghanistan. “I’m not my brother’s keeper!” Cain said that then when God pointed out to him about his brother’s blood crying out. “I’m not my brother’s keeper!” It

comes from the mouth of a murderer. It's none of my business what someone else does with his life! You don't necessarily have to kill your brother to become a murderer. In today's Gospel, Jesus shows us that we also become murderers when we suppress, ignore, or don't consider the plight of our brother or sister. Jesus set the parable of the Good Samaritan as a monument and a reminder for all the disenfranchised, the crushed, the oppressed and stated: They belong to us. And we belong to them. So Afghanistan is not a faraway country with strange customs and an exceedingly tragic history. Afghanistan is with us. We are Afghanistan. The blood of Afghanistan cries out to heaven. And where is the murderer? Some say, it is the radical Islamism that was imported from Saudi Arabia. Some say it's the foreign nations that have interfered in Afghanistan's history for centuries already. Where is the culprit? That's a question that was also asked in the first murder case of the Bible.

And the Bible replies: The murderer is among us. Cain goes about the earth murdering his brother... Abel lies on the ground... his blood cries out to heaven. The story of Cain and Abel comes immediately after the fall into sin. And with this, the Bible explains the condition of humanity. The blood of Abel cries out from the entire world to heaven. The Bible shows us why that is... and furthermore shows that the rights of human beings aren't first violated when blood flows. Actually, Abel is the suppressed, exploited, disenfranchised, abused, and insulted person. But we all know how quickly a disenfranchised "Abel" can turn around and become like "Cain." The whole history of humanity is a story of Cain and Abel. It is an evil cycle of oppressors who become murderers and become oppressed again. In all this, God doesn't abandon those condemned to murder... God asks the murderer, where is your brother Abel?... God knows, Cain knows, we also know where people have been unjustly killed. But do we know where Cain is? The brother who is guilty of killing his brother?

For most people, this is a question that doesn't affect their conscience. To some degree, we don't feel guilty in regards to the 5th Commandment, "You shall not kill!" "I'm not a murderer! I detest murder... even every kind of violence. But it does bother me how much blood the earth has received by the hands of "Cains"... and that the people who were complicit in this murder and bloodshed also thought they were innocent? Most Cains are innocent people... but are still somehow involved. In recent history, we even learn that our excessive consumption of electricity, water, and other things can lead to subsequent generations being vulnerable by our actions or even dying. And Jesus teaches us whoever is angry with his brother or whoever despises his brother is already guilty of murder. In the story of Cain as well, God first asks about the condition of the heart. "Sin lurks at the door." God warns Cain already long before the murder happens. In one case or another, I am involved after all... Perhaps also involved since I saw how my brother was treated unjustly and I made it worse through my inaction, anger, and hate.

What was it like between Cain and Abel at that time in the field? The two brothers were different. The story of Cain and Abel doesn't explain to us why they were different. God just looks at the gifts differently. For Cain, it probably meant that in the next year, he could expect a bad harvest. Disadvantaged from the start. No chance of change or advancement. How cruel is that! Luck is distributed differently. This is one story that is repeated thousands of times throughout the world. People are not the same. Abel was successful, Cain was not. That is a fact that the Bible simply illustrates and doesn't answer. Instead, Cain's reaction is explained in more detail. In fact, he should always still have enough to eat. But the advantages of others rankle him and eventually make him furious. When things aren't going well for us, humans can bear an incredible amount...but when it appears that we are suffering unjustly, the thread breaks. When one person receives an undeserved advantage and the other, despite great commitment and accomplishment, experiences no gratitude but rather is

disadvantaged, the friendly talk also often stops. All of us have experienced this at one time. There will always be people who have it better than we do; always people who also have it worse than we do. But if this question becomes a preoccupation of our thoughts and our whole life, it can happen that we become bitter and disappointed and then hold God responsible for this injustice. This is a path that leads to death – for us and for our brothers. We will never be able to take away the differences of the world, they will always be here. But what we think about and feel... that we can change. And God stands before the door and warns us, wants to help us think good thoughts and save us from the endless hate speech and bitterness. If we don't listen to God's voice, the consequences are unbearable. Blood flows and when blood flows, there are consequences. Cain thought a little dirt covered the whole thing up. Abel can't speak anymore. And if he's out of sight, buried under the ground, then he's out of my mind too. It's none of my business either. The problem is really completely eliminated from the world. "AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER"he says so brazenly. For God, the problem is that the outpouring of blood can't be so easily eliminated. The blood that cries out to heaven has consequences for everyone. It means for Cain that he must live far away from God, that he must also live separated from his family. Cain is guilty of his brother's blood. That has consequences for him... If I understand Jesus' sermon correctly, then I am also guilty the times when I got angry with people or treated people unjustly, perhaps also then when I kept silent as someone else suffered. The dying screams of one killed by a knife or shot join with the many people who are injured and broken by others.

Can and may this story be different? If yes, how can it be different? Should we be massively committed to peace in the world? Perhaps encourage people not to sign up for military service? To follow the motto, when enough people believe in peace, we have peace? The story shows us that that doesn't work. Countless weapons disarmament conferences show us how difficult it is. When suddenly thousands perish in an unjust war, we know how difficult it is to change the past. How difficult it is to be able to forgive. Can trust be won back once it is broken?

Cain's story ends astonishingly. Cain, who clearly is perceived and revealed as the culprit, experiences God's love despite also experiencing God's severe punishment. God also wants Cain to continue living and a mark should prevent his death. It should not remain that Cain is forever separated from God. Cain is given a 7-fold symbol to prevent him from being harmed by others. Something astounding happened. Abel's blood still cries out to heaven until the end of world history and God lets the murderer live. Abel's blood cries out for justice and Cain receives the punishment that he stays alive and remains guilty. And where one remains guilty, there are consequences. The cycle of murder continues! And yet the story of Cain has an end. The marks God placed on his forehead are at the same time a punishment and also a source of salvation. But they also already symbolically point to a completely new sign that that God will do. Long after Cain, God placed another mark on people's foreheads. It is the sign of Holy Baptism: The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is fixed on the forehead of each baptized Christian. This is the beginning of a new era.

Instead of Abel's blood that cries out to heaven, we have Jesus' blood shed for us. Jesus' blood doesn't cry out for revenge. In Jesus, it becomes clear that man can continue to live despite guilt. Instead of murder and revenge, there is forgiveness and reconciliation. Beneath the cross, no one needs to go down the path of brutality and violence. And that's why other people's misfortunes don't leave us indifferent. We help, comfort, and build up what was destroyed. We connect what is damaged, take in those who are outcasts. We can't do everything but what we can do, that's what we do, depending on our location and according to our ability. Whoever respects people, respects God and gives Him the

glory. Everything that we do with words and deeds, we do it all in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who changed hate and manslaughter into salvation and forgiveness. Amen.