

March 4, 2020

Genesis 4:1-12

Midweek Lenten Service  
“Confession” Sermon Series  
“Worst Brother Ever”

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Many of life’s hardest questions start with the word “why.” Why is there so much evil in the world? Why do humans like us have to deal with so much suffering and so many troubles? Why do people resort to violence, hatred, and warfare, instead of just talking, listening, and getting along?

The Bible tells us why. The Bible says that God created, in six days, a world that was absolutely perfect in every way. God fashioned a flawless home for the humans he created and loved. But when Adam and Eve, those first humans, disobeyed God’s command and fell into sin, everything changed. The world got way worse. Everything quickly got crazy. Why? Because of sin.

We heard in church this weekend that Adam and Eve, after they sinned, tried to hide from God. As if God couldn’t find them. Adam and Eve’s sin was serious, and the consequences of their sin were deadly serious. Their perfect lives, and God’s perfect world, were suddenly very, very imperfect.

And it wasn’t just them. Every generation since, all the way down to us, has faced struggles, suffering, evil, illness, death – all because of sin.

It started right away, with Adam and Eve’s kids. In just the second generation of human beings, a horrible sin, a violent act, erupted. Genesis 4 tells us about the brothers Can and Abel.

Cain is a farmer, and Abel is a herdsman. They both bring an offering to God; but Cain's offering is second-rate. He doesn't give God his due, and pay proper respect. The Bible doesn't tell us what exactly is wrong with Cain's offering. My theory is that he gives God some nasty, stringy rhubarb, or some plant-based meatloaf. Whatever it is, God is happy with Abel's offering, but unhappy with Cain's. So Cain gets really angry.

God tries to help Cain. He gives him some positive advice about his next offering, and with it a warning. The Lord warns Cain, "If you don't do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Well, you heard what happens next. Cain doesn't listen. He just gets madder and madder. And one day, when the brothers are out in the field, he attacks Abel and kills him. Cain commits a horrible, awful sin.

God speaks to Cain again. "Where is Abel your brother?" he asks. Surely God already knows the answer. God sees all things, and knows all things. He's giving Cain a chance to confess his sin, to come clean. But Cain doesn't confess. Instead, he makes it all even worse. "I don't know where Abel is," he says. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Forget that rude, snarky part at the end. Let's focus on the first part of Cain's response. "I don't know where Abel is," he says. That's an outright lie! Of course he knows where Abel is. But instead of admitting the truth, and confessing to God, Cain lies about his horrible sin.

Horrible sins have horrible consequences. Cain is cursed by God, and banished from the family home. He becomes a wanderer on the earth, an outcast, and his life becomes miserable. Cain's is a terrible, dreadful story. He's the worst brother ever, don't you agree?

If you were in church a few weeks ago, I confessed that my three brothers and I weren't angels growing up. We fought a lot, and we called each other nasty names. We didn't do anything like Cain did. But we sinned, too. The truth is, we still do.

We're all sinners, aren't we? And while some people's sins may seem way worse than any of your sins, or my sins, to God they're all the same. Sin is a horrible, terrible thing. Little sins, big sins – they're all deadly. They break our relationship with God, and they cut us off from him. He's perfect, pure, and holy. And our sins make us imperfect, impure, and unholy.

Earlier in the service, we said our words of confession. We admitted the truth. We talked to God, and confessed our sins. Why?

God already knows our failures, our anger, our laziness, our lust, our pride. He knows it all. All you've done wrong, all your bad thoughts, all your sin-prompted words. So God doesn't need our confession. But God knows that we're the ones who need to confess.

Remember how God spoke to Cain, after his horrible sin? He gave him a chance to come clean, to admit what he had done. Confession wouldn't have undone Cain's sin, or brought his brother back. But confession is the first step to healing, and renewal of the broken relationship between God and the sinner.

God gives us a chance to confess, too. He speaks to us through his Word. He invites our confession. Again, not because he needs to hear our honest, truthful words. Because we need them. We need to be honest and truthful about who we are, and what we've done. Confessing our sins is the first step to healing, and renewing that broken relationship between God and us.

Adam and Eve tried hiding, but that didn't work. Cain tried lying, and that was even worse. God calls us to honest, truthful confession. In our Second Lesson, from 1<sup>st</sup> John, God gives us a warning, and then a promise. First the warning: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Then the promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Just like Cain, when we don't confess our sins to God, we deceive ourselves, we lie to ourselves – and we lie to God. But when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us.

But let's be clear on how that happens. We said it before, horrible sins have horrible consequences. All our sins have horrible consequences. And God's perfect Son, Jesus Christ, he paid those horrible consequences in our place. Jesus suffered horribly on the cross. Jesus paid a terrible, tragic, dreadful price on Good Friday. He took the full punishment for all my sins, for all your sins, and for all the sins of humanity. And because of Jesus Christ, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, when you trust in his sacrificial death for you, God forgives you your sins. God cleanses your soul.

So, please, never take your sins lightly. They cost Jesus his life. Never try to hide them from God, or lie about them. Bring your sins to the cross. Confess them freely. Tell God you're sorry. Remember that Christ Jesus took your punishment. Put your faith in him, and him alone. And then know that you are truly forgiven, because of Christ, and Christ alone. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.