
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

February 14, 2016

Our Responsibility to One Another

*“The Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’
Cain said, ‘I don’t know. Am I my brother’s guardian?’”*
Genesis 4:9 (Common English Bible)

We all recognize this evasive response; perhaps we have used it ourselves: God questions Cain as to the whereabouts of his brother, Abel. Cain responds, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s guardian?” When you don’t have a good answer, or don’t want to answer at all, you are evasive. And many times it works! Even if everyone knows that you are being evasive. Except it doesn’t work for Cain, it doesn’t work this time. Immediately, God confronts Cain about his behavior; about Cain’s anger that results in him killing his brother, Abel. God doesn’t let Cain off the hook. Apparently, evasive maneuvers don’t work with God.

This story is a reminder that all of us are God’s children. It is a story that all of us are connected to one another by our common humanity. We belong to a great family of God that share mutual interests and concerns. Each one should care for all, and all should care for each. This notion of our interdependence with one another is pervasive throughout the Bible. In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, God calls a nation, the nation of Israel, to be a people set apart. The purpose of setting this nation apart is so that God may bless them. And God blesses them specifically so that they may bless the nations of the world. God’s concern is always for communities of people. Though God does select particular persons for special tasks – such as Moses and the apostle Paul – they are always selected for the purposes of blessing a community of people.

Naturally, this runs counter to the dominant view of western civilization that values individual initiative, individual success, and personal responsibility. None of that is bad except for when it is used as an excuse for not concerning ourselves with our brothers and sisters who have needs. There seems to be a “survival of the fittest” mentality that suggests that each one is responsible for themselves, and not the responsibility of the community. Where this is most evident is in the distribution of wealth – those who have wealth seem to have little concern about the growing gap between those who have little and those who have more than they need. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

Whether we like it or not, we are. A careful reader of the Bible cannot pretend to miss God’s concern for the poor, God’s command in the Old Testament to provide debt relief to those burdened by debt and the clear instruction to redistribute wealth in 2 Corinthians 8:14, 15. In fact, as the church gathers for worship, and an offering is collected, the church participates in a redistribution of wealth for “the blessing of the nations.” God has established that we have an obligation for the welfare of one another, without which our society disintegrates, and we become fearful of scarcity resulting in selfishness and meanness toward one another. When a child of God dies because they lacked access to adequate health care, or food, or shelter, each of us must be ready. God will ask, “Where is your brother, where is your sister?”

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