

October 23, 2016  
Sermon for The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Genesis 4:1-15

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Genesis 4:1–15 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” <sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. <sup>6</sup> The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup> And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> 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.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The Cain and Abel narrative has been well known to us since Sunday School days. This is not only a narrative about murder but also about acceptable sacrifice, that is, offerings that are pleasing to God. But...

How is it that a sacrifice is acceptable to God, and what are the God-pleasing sacrifices that we offer to the Lord today?

What does God look at to determine whether or not He accepts a sacrifice? Is it the value of the gift? Is it who is offering or the intent behind the offering? Does it even have to do with attitudes?

From our Text this morning, we see that God looks at the heart, the very being of the person, and His judgment concerning the heart determines either His acceptance or His non-acceptance of a sacrifice.

Cain and Abel had very different hearts when they brought offerings to God (vv 1–5a).

Cain brought with a heart that was not right with God. God looked first at Cain—that is, his heart—and then his offering, and God rejected his offering.

Abel brought with a heart that was right with God. Again, God looked first at Abel—that is, his heart—and then at his offering, and God accepted Abel's offering.

We will look more at Cain and Abel in a moment, but the thing is, God will do the same with us and our sacrifices.

So, what kind of heart is not right with God, which makes a sacrifice unacceptable?

That kind of heart is a heart that leads a person just to go through the motions—because he has to, because he thinks it is expected of him; by God and especially by man. Sometimes it's more about what the neighbor thinks rather than God.

In Cain's case, he brought simply *some* of the fruit of the ground.

In the original Hebrew, the Text does not say he took the best, the first portions or anything special, nor does it say that he offered it up gladly to the Lord.

This kind of heart does not love the Lord and so lacks saving faith in God. Cain had this kind of heart (vv 5b–7).

His concern was not that his sacrifice was unacceptable to God. He figured he had done what he had to do...it wasn't his fault that God wasn't happy.

Rather, Cain was concerned that he was, in his opinion, “shown up” by his brother. His pride took a hit, and thus he became angry with Abel, hating him, in essence murdering him, according to Jesus' clarification of the 6th Commandment (1 Jn 3:15). It was all about Cain, not about God, besides, if Abel had not shown him up, everything probably would have been ok.

So with Cain's attitude and mindset, his sacrifice actually was regarded as evil by God (1 Jn 3:12; Jude 11).

God, not being without mercy and wanting to forgive, warned Cain about his wrong anger, but Cain does not respond to God, rejecting God's admonition, rejecting his mercy.

When a person does not repent of sin, he can fall deeper into sin. As part of

God's mercy, we do not die immediately when we sin so we might think we get away with it, which emboldens us to go farther. Or worse yet, we believe the devil's lies that we are too bad and God does not want to forgive us anyway, so why bother to repent, why bother to stop sinning?

So Cain, having in his heart murdered Abel, took the next step and commits the physical act of premeditated murder (v 8). He felt it in his heart, caring more about vengeance than pleasing God. That is clear because he planned the murder our much better than he planned his sacrifice, his gift, to God.

To make matters worse, at least in our eyes, when God confronts Cain after the murder, Cain gives God an insolent answer and shows no remorse or repentance (v 9). Rather, Cain is concerned only about his own safety. But God, if anyone sees me they will kill me! Death as what Abel deserved, but not the precious firstborn, Cain.

If we look at the tragedy of the two brothers, it should frighten us, because more us identify with Cain than we would ever admit. We pray to the Lord to keep us from having such a heart. The brother or sister that does not hate our sibling or our neighbors. The supposed child of God who picks up the sacrifice or offering that suits our sinful nature rather than the one that truly shows our thankful heart.

What kind of heart is right with God, making a sacrifice acceptable?

This is the heart of faith.

All people by nature are unbelievers, enemies of God, unable to earn salvation. All people are sinful and, left to themselves, headed for hell.

Faith is created—and preserved—by God, in His grace, mercy, and love. Faith doesn't come from within but from outside of us.

This heart of faith believes in the triune God, and in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Through faith in Jesus, faith alone, a person has forgiveness and everlasting life. The believer is covered with the righteousness Christ acquired for all by His holy life and His innocent suffering and death. This righteousness is bestowed by the living Christ, who arose from the dead. The heart of faith grasps Him and so is right with God.

Because of Jesus, the sacrifices of believers are acceptable to God. “*Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*” (Heb 13:15).

Abel had, and we have, this kind of heart. He didn't just pick up things long the way to the sacrifice. He planned, he brought the firstborn of the flock, the fat portions, the best.

Abel was brought to faith by God through the Gospel of Gen 3:15. He, as his parents, believed this Gospel, looking forward to the future Savior, the God-man (Gen 4:1; Heb 11:4).

Abel's sacrifices of animals foreshadowed the coming perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God, whose blood would atone for the sins of the world.

God brought us to faith through Baptism, giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit and He preserves us in saving faith through His Gospel Word and Holy Communion.

The heart of faith leads a person to bring his best sacrifices to the Lord willingly, with sincerity, because he loves the Lord.

Just as Abel willingly, out of faith, brought “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.” We, as believers, bring our best sacrifices to the Lord willingly, with sincerity, because we love the Lord and because we are grateful for the salvation He freely grants us.

What are the acceptable sacrifices we today offer to the Lord, which are the best we can or as much as we are able?

These are not the animal or produce offerings of Abel and Cain and later of the Israelites, which were burned on an altar. In the New Testament, such sacrifices have been brought to an end by the completed redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

The sacrifices we bring to God today include monetary offerings, but not only these. We also offer the sacrifices of praise (Heb 13:15), the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

In fact, our whole lives are offered up as sacrifices to the Lord. That is, we dedicate ourselves to God, to serving Him.

All of us, motivated and empowered by the Lord through His Word and Sacrament, serve God by living according to His will, doing good, and showing His love to others (Rom 12:1–21; Heb 13:16).

The Cain and Abel narrative shows us what sacrifices are acceptable to God. We thank God that because of His saving work in our lives, we offer up such sacrifices to Him.

Let us, by His grace and power, continue to do so!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.