

**GOD'S REGARD FOR ATTITUDES IN THE CHURCH**

Hear again the Word of God for this eleventh Sunday after Trinity:

*Then the Adam knew the Eve, his wife, and she bore the Cain, and she said, "I have gotten (a) man of the Lord." And again she was caused to bear his brother, the Abel, and Abel was (a) keeper of sheep, and Cain was tiller of ground.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

The connection between the texts for this week is found in their revelation of people's attitudes toward God. Two human attitudes in the presence of the Divine are contrasted - arrogance and humbleness. From the attitudes of those in the Church, for all the subjects in our readings today are visibly "in the Church," the texts make clear which heart, mind and soul thoughts, words and deeds God condemns, and which He blesses. As this year's sermons have normally been drawn from the Old Testament readings, we will do so again today, as Moses writes about two of the first members of the Church on earth.

*Then the Adam knew the Eve, his wife, and she bore the Cain, and she said, "I have gotten (a) man of the Lord." And again she was caused to bear his brother, the Abel, and Abel was (a) keeper of sheep, and Cain was tiller of ground.<sup>2</sup>*

The passage begins with "then," which reminds the hearer that some events have gone on before. Namely those are the Creation, the work in the Garden, the Serpent's deception of Eve, Adam's Fall into Sin, God's punishing the three evildoers, Satan, Eve and Adam, and God's Promise of Salvation to Adam through Eve. The procreation of man from woman had begun. Adam with Paradise still fresh in his

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4:1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 4:1-2.

memory, and likely his eyes, could look upon the Angel with blazing sword who guarded the entrance to Eden that Adam may not enter. Eve could recall what was lost also, and what God had promised to her and her man in their repentance. In obedience to God's command, and with His blessing they began immediately to interact as husband and wife in the most intimate contact God had given and has reserved for one man – one woman marriages. From their one-flesh union came fruit, in the form of children.

Two of them are named in our text. Their names, unlike those of some people in our culture, have meaning attached to their conceptions and births. The two names, Cain and Abel, display to us who will hear the text and its revealed meaning that our first parents understood God's Promise to send a Savior who would buy them back from their sins, and take the wages of death upon Himself. Yet, their naming of their sons also shows that though repentant and forgiven, their sinful natures still clung to them.

Yes, Adam and Eve after the Fall into sin had what we term Old Adams clinging to them. Their sinful selves allowed them to deceive themselves, this time without the help of the Devil, into thinking God had done something more that just give them mortal sons. The name Cain, finds its meaning described in the text, "to get." That is, the new parents believed that God had blessed them with the Christ, for Eve declares, "I have gotten Man from the YHWH." This is the first use of the term that would later, millennia later, be used of Jesus, "the Son of Man," who was begotten of Woman.

So that the hearers of the events that occurred in the first Church of God on earth would understand how much hope our first parents placed in Cain, we have heard the name of the second son, Abel. This name is best tied to the word that means “vain,” “vanity,” or “emptiness.” That is Abel, in the minds of his parents is unnecessary for his parents’ salvation, for they had first gotten the Man of the Promise, Cain. In the parent’s eyes, minds, and hearts, it is clear that the first-born son is the blessed one. In him are all their hopes for redemption placed. In the second son, there is no such hope. His birth, in terms of still-sinning Adam and Eve, is empty of meaning for them. They believed God had given them the prize son, and all other children were nice, but really not necessary in the scope of salvation. Human misinterpretation of “natural” events did not end with them. Consider something that happened this week, in the visible Church, in Minnesota:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America met in national convention this week in order to decide weighty theological matters. Among those was a social statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.” That document provides background on a later resolution that was needed on later vote needed to determine the denomination’s acceptance of homosexuals who are in committed relationships to serve as clergy. Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” in attempting to move the ELCA toward a resolution of divisions over same-sex marriage, states in part:

“(The ELCA) has called upon congregations and members to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families, and to advocate for their legal protection.”<sup>3</sup>

Just before the delegates approved adopting the non-binding statement by the exact number of votes needed, a tornado struck both the convention center where the representatives were meeting, and Central Lutheran Church, the host congregation for the ELCA convention. No one was hurt. Immediately conclusions about God’s response to the work of the convention were drawn, including this from the chairman of the committee overseeing the statement: "We trust that the weather is not a commentary on our work."<sup>4</sup>

And from there newspaper and internet reports have run amuck drawing conclusions, either pro or con regarding the event. The reality thus far is that they, in tying the tornado to the statement’s approval, are following in Adam and Eve’s footsteps. That is they, like you and I at times, are reading into events things which God has not clearly revealed. That takes us back to the events in the first Church on earth. Cain is named as the Promised Man of God, and Abel is named as empty of promise.

To show how wrong Adam and Eve were in interpreting God’s actions and Word without a clear revelation from Him, Moses takes us, in the same passage, from the boys’ births and naming, to their earthly vocations, and from there to their worship of the Creator.

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<sup>3</sup> “Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust, April 2009. p. 16 (615-616)

<sup>4</sup> Olsen, Ted. ELCA Assembly: Was God in Either Whirlwind? Christianity Today. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/augustweb-only/133.41.0.html>, accessed August 21, 2009.

*And it became, in the course of days (that) Cain brought from the fruit of the ground (an) allegiance offering to YHWH. And Abel brought also from the firstborn of his flock, and their fatlings. YHWH regarded upon the Abel and upon his allegiance offering; but the Cain and his offering did not regard, and Cain was very angry and his face fell.<sup>5</sup>*

God's regard for attitudes in the Church is displayed in His rejection of Adam and Eve's Chosen One, and God's acceptance of Adam and Eve's Empty One. Later biblical texts interpret the Lord's rejection of the Gotten One's gift and acceptance of the Empty One's gifts for us. That is, both were regarded according to the heart of the giver, as God's Word testifies:

*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.<sup>6</sup>*

The heart, or inner attitude of the giver is that which God views. It is the humility or arrogance of the people in the Church which is being called into account today. The Lord, in these texts, from the attitudes and actions, of real people from our history, is calling you to examine yourself with regard to your life in the Church. Are you approaching Him with your gifts of time, talent or possessions with an attitude of obligation, or to gain outward approval before your fellow Christians, or because you actually think those things are *yours* in the first place? If so, God's warning to the Cain stands for you, and your Old Adam:

*Then YHWH said to the Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? Is it not (so that) if you cause to do good you will be accepted; and if you do not cause to do good – at the door sin crouches, and upon you is its desire. But you must master it."<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 4:3-5.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 11:4.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 4:6-7.

In the descendants of Adam the effects of sin become multiplied. In the chapter before this text, the Church learned of the first of humanities three great adversaries, the Devil. Now, in this text, in the Church of Old, the faithful learned, and continue to learn, of the other two great enemies of believers – our own sinful natures, and the fallen world. God is calling Cain to repentance, that he may fall into no greater evil. This God still does when he calls the children of Adam to turn from your sins, and walk in newness of life. God even gives His children power to turn from their sins, that is faith in His Promised Son.

Cain, in his pride of position, out of habit or obligation to the sacrifices he learned from his father Adam to give to God in homage, lets his worldly possessions influence his heart. The type of gift returned to God is not condemned in this text. Later, in the Mosaic sacrificial system, both grain and animals are deemed acceptable for sacrifice to God. But, when one gives to God, one is called to respond joyfully to what God has done in giving the gifts first to His people. So it was for Cain and Abel, so it is for you.

Hear this clearly, this day's texts speak of allegiance, homage and thank offerings to God. There is no indication in the text or its scriptural parallels that Abel, for example, killed his offering. Nor is there any hint that Cain gave only the chaff, and not the fullness of the grain. Rather, Abel gave in humility the best that had come from his earthly vocation. Cain had merely given some, not the best, or even first-fruits, from his worldly vocation. Abel responded to God with the spirit of the Gospel. Cain fulfilled the

letter of the Law. One who was deemed by humans to be empty, vanity, nothing, gave the greater gift –for it was borne of faith. The one who was deemed savior by humans gave the lesser gift – for it was borne of obligation.

Cain, as we know, was not the Savior. His parents, who had put their hopes in him, learned of their error of interpreting God’s work for themselves without waiting on His revelation. Abel, as we know, was also not the Savior.

But he was the one whom God delivered out of sin that infects the whole of creation first! Abel was the one who had faith in God’s Promised Savior. He responded to that faith with sacrifices of homage to the One who has power to save. Abel, knew that His Lord would save him from sin, separation from God, and eternal death. And, as you who are now aware of your Savior, he responded with thanksgiving from his heart, mind, and soul.

God took the Empty One, and held him in the faith of the Promised One until death. He who was murdered was delivered from sin’s condemnation. He can no longer be tempted by the devil, the world or his sinful flesh.

To whom did Abel look for His salvation? He looked to the Son of the Promise, the One who would come to crush the head of the serpent. He looked to the One who would empty Himself of His divine nature, take on our flesh, and deliver us from the effects of Adam’s Fall. Abel looked to the Christ of God, the One whom God has revealed to be Jesus of Nazareth.

It is to this same Jesus, Eve's Promised Son, that God calls you to look to at all times. He alone is your Deliverer. He saves you, not on account of your keeping the Law, of your self-worth, or personal possession. He rescues you from sin, death and the devil on account of His self-sacrificing love, His enduring mercy, His compassion on sinners.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Trinity XI (*LSB* One-year series)

Genesis 4:1-15; I Corinthians 15:10; Luke 18:9-14

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**