

Text: Genesis 4:6-16

Title: Where is your brother?

Translated by Myung-Ha Kim

1.

Taking care of a family is not an easy journey. Raising children is a particularly difficult task. Korean elders often used to refer to raising children as farming and thus, called it "child farming." Because raising children, like farming, requires hard work and timely care. Several aspects of having children are enjoyable and worthwhile, but it also seems that many times there is more hard work and effort in raising children as well. Additionally, if you have multiple children, you will need to provide adapt the way you care for each child. I've heard that even twins are very different from each other.

We must pay attention to the fact that the story immediately following Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden of Eden is the story of the brothers. Only in Genesis 4, the Hebrew word for brother, 'Ah (אָח)', is used six times. The birth of these two sons must have been a great comfort in Adam and Eve's life. The joy of giving birth to their firstborn was so great that they named him Cain, which means "to add, to produce." Soon after, when their second son, Abel, was born, it must've been very comforting for Adam and Eve to have two sons. Cain, the eldest son, and Abel, the second son, seem to have been very different from one another. This is evident when you look at their career choices. Cain became a farmer, and Abel became a shepherd. The life of a farmer plowing the fields and the life of a shepherd tending sheep are completely different lifestyles. Farming in a barren land where thornbushes and thistles grow must not have been easy. Of course, the life of a shepherd was also difficult, but I think farming in barren land was much more difficult than finding food for oneself and raising sheep. This is my opinion purely from my experience in farming.

2.

The conflict between Cain and Abel arises from their different sacrifices or offerings. Cain and Abel took what they each had produced and offered these things as sacrifices to God. However, the problem arises from the different attitudes of the two people who offered it. Until now, many interpreters have made great efforts to find out what the difference was between Cain and Abel's offerings. Some even make the ridiculous claim that God prefers animals to grains. The Calvinist tradition interprets the reason as Cain having a problem. You can assume what kind of person he was by observing that he later stoned his younger brother to death. Some interpret it because Abel offered sacrifices more carefully. Referring to the New Testament terminology, Abel says that God accepted the sacrifice because he offered it "in Spirit and truth" (John 4). Any interpretation is reasonable, but we honestly cannot judge God's will from our narrow views. Frankly, we do not know why Cain's offering did not please God. It was simply God's will.

An important factor is Cain's reaction after making his sacrifice. If it was a humble and honest response, Cain should have reflected on himself. He would have thought to reflect on why God did not accept him and if there was a problem with his offering that God did not like. However, Cain tried to find the reason for someone other than himself. God knew Cain's heart at that time and gave him harsh advice in Verse 7. **"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."** It seems that God was evaluating Cain's heart and conduct, He is warning Cain, who is reacting with a wrong attitude and action. Even after hearing these words from God, Cain did not change his mind or his heart. No, rather, he didn't understand God even more. He forgot God's Word that he had to rule over sin, and instead gave the initiative to sin and decided to kill his younger brother.

3.

Cain decides to become mankind's first judge. He decides to pass judgment on his brother even though he has not taken the BAR exam, and no one has made him a judge. Cain's court sentenced his brother Abel to death. Cain's court was not only without justice, but it was hard to find any sort of mercy. Even though Abel is his brother who shares the same blood, there seems to be no mercy or love to be given to him. The principles governing Cain's court were envy and jealousy. The criterion for judging Abel's sin was envy, and the criterion for Cain punishing him was jealousy, which also had the same root as envy. In the end, envy and jealousy were as violent as the snake that coiled around the door of Cain's heart and swallowed him whole. The blade of Cain's judgment seemed to be aimed at Abel, but it was pointed at God. Cain wanted to take his anger out on God by killing his brother, but he couldn't take out his anger on God. What sin did Abel have to die for? People try to relieve their anger by finding a weaker being than themselves. After being fed up with the boss at work, the dad comes home and yells at his spouse out of anger. The wife, annoyed by her husband's unprovoked anger, yells at her son without any plausible reason. Angry at the mother's nagging, the son goes outside and kicks the dog. Unresolved anger bites its tail and passes on to those who are weaker.

The root of Cain's violent actions stemmed from the act of comparing. He compared his offering to Abel's and God's evaluation of them. Cain did not want to admit the differences between the brothers. He always had to be ahead of his brother and outperform his brother. I don't know if it was enforced by his parents or if it's something he created himself, but Cain compared and suffered. As we discussed last week, a life of comparison is an unhappy life. The results of comparing are truly devastating. Comparison is a self-defeating, foolish act. The envy and jealousy that started from Cain's comparison led to a foolish judgment and returned to him like a boomerang. Look at God's sentencing that came back as a boomerang. "Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." The curse of killing his brother Abel was fatal for Cain, who had to live as a farmer.

Cain was so violent when he killed his younger brother, but now he is arguing against God as if he was the victim. Humans are such fragile beings. There is a saying that it is a "fire within me". If I do it, it's romance, but if someone else does it, it's an affair. Isn't Cain arguing that the judgment he passed on his brother was just and that God's judgment against him was unjust?

However, it was at this moment that something stranger than Cain's judgment toward Abel was happening to Cain. It means that God is responding to Cain's protest. Cain complains to God that if he continues to live as a wanderer and a stranger, everyone will try to kill him. God takes such a sinner into his arms and speaks. **"It will not be like that. Anyone who kills Cain will be punished sevenfold." The Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who met him could kill him (v. 15)."**

When Cain unleashed his merciless judgment on his brother, he was unaware. But now as he anticipates the dangers approaching him, Cain realizes the seriousness of his circumstance.

It is amazing the mercy and compassion of God, who takes himself as the protector of Cain, a sinner who deserves punishment for the sin of striking and killing his brother. We can observe God's love to embrace human beings who are in danger due to disobedience.

4.

Why does the story of Cain and Abel appear right after Genesis 3 which is the story of the fall of humanity? First, it is to show the reality of humanity that has left God. It is to accuse the human weakness and sinfulness which led to killing a brother, who was like a family member and friend, due to envy and jealousy. Then, the Bible contrasts the love and mercy of God who embraces the weak, sinful human being. The mercy of God who cares about the life of the murderer and being his protector is amazing.

The story of Cain and Abel does not convey the message that Cain is a bad guy and that you should not live like Cain. Rather, it wants to show us how destructive humans can be when we compare ourselves to others and fail to acknowledge each other's diversities and differences. Brotherhood repeated six times is meant to tell us how valuable brotherly love is. It was meant to be paradoxical to show how good and beautiful it is for brothers to live together in unity (Psalm 103). The first step in living as a child of God is brotherly love.

Like the words of Psalm 103, 1 John 3:14 connects brotherly love with eternal life.

"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death."

5.

The younger brother Abel represents those who are weaker. God did not call us to judge as judges for those who are weaker than ourselves. Rather, He called us to be protectors of the weak and to love them.

Even now, God asks us, "Where is your brother Abel?" He invites us not to be judges but to be brothers. He calls us to get out of the slavery of envy and jealousy that started from comparison and move to the place of brotherly love or neighborly love.

Is there any way to escape from the sin of envy or jealousy? There are two ways. First, I must not be the judge of my brother and neighbors. To do so, we must not forget that we are nothing more than a 'day-living' creature. Only those who realize the mystery that my 'identity' comes from the people next to me. Only those who are mystical about the existence of others can advance to loving others.

Second, when we feel responsible for the socially underprivileged and live by helping them, we can become true people of God. The fact that God volunteered to be a guardian for Cain, who became a murderer, showed us what kind of life we should lead. God won't just leave Cain who has become a vulnerable being. He puts a mark on his body where he can see it, revealing that he is protected by God. We also must embrace vulnerable beings to escape from the bondage of envy and jealousy.

Who are the vulnerable brothers around us? It may be different depending on where you live, but many refugees live as our neighbors here in Rochester and greater Minnesota. They left their homes and came to this strange land for a better life, yet many times they are discriminated against like Cain who was stigmatized. When I first came to Minnesota, I noticed women wearing hijabs and Africans wearing Muslim attire. To be honest, it is true that people with different religions, skin colors, and cultures feel unfamiliar and strange. Around the house where I live, several neighbors appear to be African refugees. The consolation they receive will be great just by smiling at them, talking to them, and saying hello. We all remember the peace of mind we felt when we first immigrated to this land and the Americans were kind to us and smiled at us.

We will have to take care of each other to see if there are vulnerable brothers in our church. For instance, if you have been to Rochester for less than a year, you can think of it as vulnerable. This is especially true for those who have immigrated to the country. Everyone is vulnerable when they enter a foreign land. Emotionally unstable. There aren't many people to talk to. Everything is unstable because he or she has left the stable place where they or felt comfortable. I sometimes make absurd mistakes here in a foreign land that I would never make in Korea. Then I realize how foolish I probably looked and my self-esteem plummets. However, telling those people it's okay and warmly encouraging them will be greatly comforting. Simply, sharing a smile or asking them how they're doing will add a lot of encouragement to their lives.

As the words of 1 John: 3 say, those who do not love their brothers and sisters remain in death. Loving our 'brother' is evidence of our faith. If you are a man of faith, love your brother or your neighbor. Treat those around you mystically so as not to fall into the weakness of envy or jealousy by comparing yourself to them. Only those who live with a sense of understanding that "I become who I am because of the presence of those around me" can taste true freedom in life.

When this sense of mystery disappears from our lives, life becomes burdensome and the room for others disappears. The Lord still asks us who want to live a life of faith. "Where is your brother?" Who is your brother and where is he now? Our Lord desperately wants you to respond to His call to live as a brother and neighbor, not as a judge. I bless you to live a blessed life that provides a place for those who have no place to stand.