

in several places around the world. But all the crying in the world cannot be heard if we are not listening, if we do not care enough to hear the cries.

If we fail to listen to the crying of our brothers and sisters and if we fail to love and take care of them, we are like Cain who killed his brother. This morning once again God is asking each of us the same question: 'Where is your brother, where is your sister?' Do you know? Do you care?

Cain lives in each of us and he shows his marked face whenever we fail to be brothers and sisters to the insignificant, the poor, the neglected, the lonely, and so on. No greater image of being a brother or a sister is found than that of Jesus on the cross. 1 John 3:16 says, "*Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*" His love marked his life and then shaped the future of our world. Our listening, caring, and loving to Abel, the insignificant, will change our church, community, world, and finally ourselves.

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The Bible's Four Great Questions #2:

Where Is Your Brother/Sister?

Genesis 4:1-16

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How would you feel if someone comes to you and says, "I hate you"? How would you feel if your friend says, "I am on your side no matter who you are." Our lives are marked by those who love us and by those who refuse to love us. We are products of love given and love denied.

In today's text Cain refused to love his brother Abel. Cain is the prototype of human anger, hatred, prejudice and violence. As we read about Cain's murder of brother Abel, we may have a question: 'Why did Cain kill Abel?' A more foundational question of this story is about God's behavior: 'Why did God accept Abel's offering yet reject Cain's offering?' Since this passage gives no explanation of it, we must look elsewhere in the Bible. In 1 John we are told that Cain murders Abel because Cain is evil. Hebrews 11 says: "*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.*" (11:4) Okay, Abel has faith according to Hebrew. Even though we accept Abel's faith, there is nothing to suggest that Cain does not have faith and does not want to please God.

In today's story Cain brought an offering to please God. There is no explanation of the rejection of Cain's offering. It shows that life is unfair. How many of you are the older brother or sister? Unfortunately, there are many unfair cases of siblings, especially older siblings in the Bible: The older son Esau complained that his younger brother Jacob stole their father's blessing from Esau. The older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son complained that his father threw a welcome home party for his younger brother who spent all of his money. The older sister Martha complained that Mary got to sit with Jesus and listened to his words while Martha was working in the kitchen. In each case, it is unfair. What I want

to emphasize today is not whether life is fair or unfair. We need to focus more on how will we respond at those times when life is unfair.

Life is unfair at times. When we face unfairness, what counts is how we respond. Are we going to get angry and blow out? Are we going to get frustrated and withdraw? Or are we going to seek to obey God and to love others even in the face of life's unfairness? What kind of life are we going to pursue?

As sin attacks our relationships and produces suspicion, hatred, prejudice and violence, God asks a second question: 'Where is your brother/sister?' God asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" The name "Abel" means insignificant or worthless. God is asking us, 'How do you care for insignificant brothers/sisters around you?' Cain's response shows our justification of irresponsibility, apathy and cruelty on the insignificant people. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' 'Am I my sister's keeper?'

After killing his brother, Cain had a fear that someone would kill him. Cain's unwillingness to be his brother's keeper locked him out of the human community. He had to live in Nod, which means "wandering." He moved away from God's purposes and headed nowhere.

Today's question leads us to think of another important question: 'If I am my brother's keeper/sister's keeper, who is my brother/sister?' The Bible uses "brother/sister" in three distinct and inseparable ways. First, there are the blood brothers/sisters who are our family and relatives. It is understandable and natural to take care of our family. We are responsible to love, protect, assist, and listen to our family. However, our love must not excuse or justify them when they are irresponsible or they refuse to take responsibility for their own life. God does not call us to live our family's life, but to challenge us to live with responsibility and purpose.

In the Bible, "brother/sister" also refers to our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must work constantly to love each other in the church. The goal of faith is to be able to look at each other and say, "God loves you and so do I." Sometimes the best we can do is look at each other and say, "God loves you and I'm trying to love you." Being our brother's brother or sister's sister means going after him or her when he/she is out in Nod and when they are in nowhere land of wandering away from God. Jesus came to look for us when we were out there in Nod and he also sends us out to look after our brothers and sisters.

The third use of "brother/sister" in the Bible covers everyone else around the world. They may be brothers and sisters we do not know or we may not like them. 'Who is my brother?' 'Who is my sister?' They are anyone in need! Jesus defined such brothers and sisters, saying *"You will undoubtedly ask, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or sick or in prison and did not help you?' And I will say to you, 'When you did not help one of the least of my brothers and sisters in need you did not help me."* (Matthew 25:44-45) In other words, when we do not help Abel who is an insignificant person, we do not help Jesus. Jesus calls us to see those who are in need as our brothers and sisters. A loving, serving relationship with our Creator is not separable from a loving, serving relationship with those whom God has created.

God still asks us, "Where is your brother, where is your sister?" And the blood of Abel still cries out in our families, our churches, our communities and our world. That blood cries out in a thousand different ways, in a thousand different places, wherever and whenever hatred and anger, prejudice and violence call the shots. Abel's blood cries out from the victims of the hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico, from the victims of the shootings in Las Vegas, from the victims of the wild fire in California, from people in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the refugees