

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Genesis 4:1-12

You Shall Not Murder!

1. *The root of the problem*
2. *The result of the problem, if unchecked*
3. *The solution to the problem*

Hymns: 237 – 767 – 261 – 260

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Genesis 4:1-12 –

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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 master it."

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 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."

“You – shall – not – murder!”

OK, should we move on? Perhaps we could go right past this commandment and on to the sixth. After all, I'd imagine the percentage of us here this morning who have actually ended someone else's life by an act of murder is somewhere near 0%. Nevertheless, a careful read of Scripture will reveal that even if 0% of us have committed an actual murder, 100% of us here today have broken this commandment. That means that 100% of us will benefit from reviewing the 5th Commandment this morning.

Before we get too far into the 5th Commandment, let's note that the 5th Commandment covers a great many moral issues, too many to address in one sermon. We'll need to zero in on one aspect of this commandment. Therefore, we will not be covering topics such as:

- Suicide – Scripture teaches that it is clearly wrong for a person to take their own life
- Abortion – The Bible is clear that life begins inside a mother when a baby is growing in the womb, and that ending that life is ending a life.
- Capital punishment – Scripture teaches that God's representatives in the government have the right to end someone's life if they have ended another's life.
- War – This has been the topic of many a discussion. Again, God's representatives in the government have the right to wage just war against an unjust nation. In fact, an illustration the Bible uses for

the Christian life is that of a soldier.

- Euthanasia – The Lord says in Deuteronomy 32, *“There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life.”* To actively “play God” and end a person’s life by our hand is wrong.

So what are we going to discuss today? The angle we’re going to take is seen in the first lesson that we read today, the account of the first murder as Cain killed his brother Abel. **As we hear the 5th Commandment say, “You shall not murder,” let’s see:**

- 1. The root of the problem**
- 2. The result of the problem, if unchecked**
- 3. The solution to the problem**

We read in Genesis 4, *“Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, ‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.’ Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.”*

This account follows immediately after the first sin in the Garden of Eden and God’s banishing Adam and Eve from Paradise. At some point after the devastating fall into sin, Adam and Eve had children. We know some details about the first family. Two of these children were named Cain and Abel. We hear that Cain was the big brother. By trade, Cain was a farmer and Abel was a

shepherd. It’s also evident that their parents had instructed them in spiritual matters. They not only knew who the Lord was, but also knew it was proper to bring God offerings, even though it was long before God’s prescribed Old Testament offerings that he commanded Moses to have his people bring.

Here is where the problem’s root becomes evident. Cain’s offering was rejected, while Abel’s offering was accepted. How did Cain know this? We’re not directly told, but somehow he knew that the Lord did not accept the offerings that he brought. Cain was not happy.

What did Cain conclude? His whole outlook on the situation was wrong. He seemed to think the problem lay with someone else. It must be God’s fault that he did not accept his offering. Why would he react unfavorably? And more demonically, he felt hatred with Abel when his own offering was not accepted. What was reality, however? Why did God not accept Cain’s offering?

- We hear what might be a clue in vv. 3-4: *“Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.”* Did Cain not bring “fat” (generous) portions as an offering? And were these not firstfruits from Cain’s fruit of the soil?
- Hebrews 11 in the NT says: *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.”* We hear that the faith of Cain and Abel were a key factor in this account. Abel had genuine faith in his heart and Cain did not.

- 1 John 3 says: *“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.”* Cain belonged to the evil one. He was not a member of God’s family through faith.

The problem did not lie outside Cain, but in his own heart!

God made a gracious attempt to straighten Cain out. He said, *“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?”* But Cain would have none of it. **When the root of the problem lay within himself, he was convinced he should fix this problem by “fixing” his brother.**

Is your struggle with the 5th Commandment the same as Cain’s struggle? I don’t mean to imply that you have a complete lack of faith, as the Bible informs us about Cain. But when it comes to the problems, conflict, and ill feelings you have for others, might the root problem lie within ourselves instead of others? We’re pretty good at making it about others, aren’t we?

- I can’t believe he has that opinion.
- I can’t believe he said that.
- I can’t believe she could have done that.
- They did it first.
- I just never liked them. I’m not really sure why. They just never clicked with me.
- I think they think they’re better than me.
- Our backgrounds are so different, I just don’t like them.

Just take a moment to think about your less than lukewarm relationships with others. From your point of view, aren’t those relationships most often soured by something that’s “their fault?”

Perhaps your root struggle with the 5th Commandment lies within a serious spiritual weakness that you have:

- You have a hard time forgiving others.
- You have difficulty putting the best construction on situations, but rather like to search for “dirt” on a person.
- You have a biased view of what life is like and it colors your opinion of others.
- You have a problem with anger.

Many a parent has shown wisdom to their children in counseling them when they’ve had problems getting along with others when they’ve said, “Worry about yourself.” The root problem often lies right within our own hearts, and the root problem can lead to bigger problems.

2 – The story’s been told about two neighbors who had an ongoing dispute. The rift between them became quite bitter. This anger led one of them to build a brick wall on the south border of his yard, so it would be between them. He built it 20 feet high, so he could block his neighbor out. He quickly found out that he had hurt himself in the process. Because it was to the south, he had succeeded in blocking out much of the sunshine that he enjoyed getting in the past. It was also brought to the attention of the city that he had built a wall that was illegal in height, which he would have to rectify. Often times, the one who hates is led to results that

hurt himself in the process. (*Encyclopedia of Sermon Illustrations*, p. 97)

Such was the case with Cain also. We read that the Lord said to Cain, “*If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*” Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘*Let's go out to the field.*’ And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.” The Lord knew that unchecked hate toward another would lead to an unfortunate result, so he warned Cain about it. It was a loving call to repentance and a warning that deeper sin loomed, if Cain did not check his anger.

Sadly, rather than heeding God’s call to repentance, Cain failed to control his sin and sprang into action. He invited Abel out to the field alone and he murdered him. We see the heinousness of this crime in the way Scripture describes it. Genesis says Cain “attacked Abel.” Literally, it’s a verb that denotes rising upright and depicts a violent scene. Other places of Scripture use the verb for slaughtering and butchering animals for “kill,” when referring to this account. And we can’t help but see the repetitive use of the words “his brother” in this account as we’re reminded of who exactly is shockingly being murdered.

See what the result of ill feelings are, if left unchecked? “But pastor,” you may say, “no matter my ill feelings toward another, I would never follow through by “rising up” and “slaughtering” another, ending their life. Even if that is true, our unchecked attitude of hate will lead to more. It will lead to:

- Your own elevated stress level and blood pressure
- Your desire to avoid someone, perhaps someone even in the family of God

- Passing by someone without a “hello,” when they’ve greeted you
- Gossip
- Dirty looks
- Verbal abuse
- Hazing
- Physicality (High school and college students, this probably isn’t a rare thing for you to hear, is it?)

Unfortunately, there are some here today who have not just accidentally stepped over the line on occasion when it comes to these things, but have found themselves living pretty comfortably on the other side of that line!

3 – We need a solution. What was God’s attempted solution for Cain? “*The LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ ‘I don't know,’ he replied. ‘Am I my brother's keeper?’ The LORD said, ‘What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 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.’*”

How did the Lord deal with Cain? He gave him time. Why would God give him time in this world after his heinous crime? He certainly had the right to make Cain forfeit his time. We can point to two reasons:

1. God gave Cain time to repent. He graciously allowed him more days in his life to come around and confess this sin.

2. God gave Cain time to reflect on what was coming down the road in world history. He could look ahead to the One that his parents had instructed him about, the “offspring who would crush the serpent’s head.” Cain had been promised a Savior who would die for his sin. The Son of God who would come into the world would pay the price of his guilt.

This is the only place we see the solution to the problem today. It only lies in Christ. Jesus actively kept the 5th Commandment for us. He instructed his disciples, “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” (John 13:34) He even taught them, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*” (Luke 6:27-31) Jesus also put this into practice in his life. When he was struck in the face unjustly at his trial, he did not retaliate in hate. When he was crucified, what words could he have spat at his murderers? Yet we hear none of it. In fact, 2 Peter 2 tells us, “*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*”

Not only did he actively keep the 5th Commandment for you and me, but when he was hatefully murdered on the cross, he bore your sin against this commandment. 1 Peter 2 continues, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*” Because of his innocent death, your sin is GONE. Removed.

Finally, that leaves us with the question, “What now?” By God’s grace we seem to be at a different place than Cain ended up. What now? We end up treating others the way another set of neighbors did. Two neighbors were at peace and got along well with one another. There was no brick wall between them. Moreover, right at the property line, their lawns appeared to be well groomed and greener than anywhere else. When asked about it, one of the neighbors explained that when he watered, he made sure that the sprinkler covered his lawn and then some, and his neighbor always did the same. That way, instead of a brick wall between them, they shared a greener lawn. (Encyclopedia of Sermon Illustrations, p. 97,98)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, may we be moved in a similar way! May we live in the love that Jesus has planted in us. As the grace of God fills us to do so, we will then enjoy green pastures in our relationships with others. Amen.

Small text: Sermon thoughts adapted from a sermon originally written by Pastor Aaron Boehm, Shepherd of the Hills (WELS), LaMesa, CA