

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 23, 2022

TEXT: GENESIS 4:9

THEME: AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

In the name of Jesus:

We live in an age where words don't mean much. We use words by the bushel, we live in an age when, instead of typing a manuscript, we call it by another name, word processing. And as a result, we don't know what to do with the words that surround us. Politicians use words, making empty promises by the boatload. When we call into a company for a repair, they don't say that we will be there by noon, they instead give you a window, we will be there between 8 and noon. Words can be slippery things, and so when people make promises, or use words that are meant to capture our attention, we raise a skeptical eyebrow.

When the Lord uses words, He means what He says and says what He means. Always. No ifs, ands or buts. So, when the Lord told Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit from the knowledge of good and evil, the Lord meant what He said. Satan whispered softly in the shadows to Adam and Eve asking

the question: “Did God really mean what He said, and say what He means?”

And the answer is yes. It is always yes.

So after the Fall into sin, Cain and Abel are out working in the land that the Lord gave them to be productive in. Cain worked in the fields, working by the sweat of his brow. The land that Cain worked was cursed by God as a result of sin. Nevertheless, Cain brings forth his offering to show the Lord that he is doing what the Lord told him to do. Abel, on the other hand, brings to the Lord the firstborn of his flock, and this pleases God, for Abel’s offering is done in love, giving the Lord the very best of what he had. It is instructive for us in how we look at our offerings verses how God looks at our offerings. Cain looked at his offering and concluded it was acceptable. God, however, looked at his heart, and saw that Cain’s offering was lacking because it wasn’t given in love for the Lord. Abel brings his offering, the very best before the Lord, for he loved the Lord. We tend to look at our offerings first, whereas God looks at our heart and attitude first, then the offering.

The Lord accepted Abel’s offering, while Cain’s was found wanting. This angered Cain, who then asked for a meeting with Abel out in the fields, where he murdered his brother in cold blood.

The Lord calls out to Cain, asking him where's Abel, his brother? Now, the Lord knows all things. The Lord knew what happened. Cain did as well. Cain knows well the answer to the question the Lord poses to him, so he asks a question of his own. Cain's response has been enshrined among all of the words that have been used in the history of the world. Cain replied: "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, Cain was indeed his brother's keeper, and now Cain is his brother's killer.

Am I my brother's keeper? This is a question that the Lord Himself goes great lengths to answer in the rest of the Bible, Old Testament and New alike. And in each and every instance, the Lord proclaims that His people are to be his brother's keeper, for this is the way and the will of the Lord.

We read in the later chapters of Genesis the story of Joseph, one of Jacob's 12 sons who was sold for a price and grew up among the Egyptians. Joseph was given a gift by the Lord to interpret dreams. Pharaoh's dreams troubled him, but Joseph showed Pharaoh that a great famine was coming so be prepared for the worst. Joseph rose in stature and power, second only in command to Pharaoh. When given the opportunity to pay back his brothers for the evil done to him, Joseph responded in mercy and kindness. He brought his family to Egypt, provided for their every need, and when asked why he had

acted in this manner, showing mercy instead of wrath, Joseph responded, “ you meant evil for me but God meant it for good.” Joseph forgave his brothers and did what was best for them, sparing their lives by becoming a blessing to them.

God’s people continually were instructed to live in this light. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, interprets all of the Old Testament, reminding and instructing us to love our enemies and to give to the needy saying: “when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” And yet, how do we sometimes respond to those in need? By asking the same question that Cain asked, “am I my brother’s keeper?” “Am I expected to go the extra mile to help someone in need? I don’t want to be bothered, I have enough on my plate, I have my own problems, God takes care of those who take care of themselves. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Lord answers our indifference and our lack of love by showing just how much He loves us! For while we were yet sinners, Jesus came down from heaven! Jesus became your brother and my brother, He took on human flesh,

to be our Substitute in life and in death! For as the writer of the Hebrews writes: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4: 15).

Jesus came down from heaven for He was and is the One Promised from old, who would pay the price in His life and death for our forgiveness so that we would be called sons of God. Jesus is like Joseph, only greater, for Jesus is our Brother's Keeper who, although He was loved by the Father He was hated by the world, falsely accused of crimes and sins He did not commit, rejected, spat upon, and then crucified on a cross. All so that He would rise again on Easter morning, glorified, and now given the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will eventually bow and every tongue confess that He is truly Lord and God.

Jesus is your Lord and Savior. You have been baptized in the living waters from heaven. And as you have been baptized into Christ, you have now put on Christ. Jesus lives in and through you, so that, just as He has served you and embraced you with His love, you now, in His stead are given opportunities to serve Him by helping others. To put in another way, we are given

opportunities to show our love for others by being involved in their lives, meeting their needs, by being in the true sense “My brother’s keeper.”

So instead of being judgemental of others and their condition in life, we act in love and seek to serve others. Instead of treating the needy with contempt, we look upon them in compassion, humbly serving them even as Jesus served and serves us. When wronged, we forgive. When presented an opportunity to show love to our neighbor as ourselves, we respond not by asking the question: Am I my brother’s keeper? In order to absolve us of any and all responsibility. Rather, we respond emphatically not with empty words but with actions of love, saying yes, I am my brother’s keeper. For Jesus reminds us that we are His new Creation and that whatever we do to the least of these My brethren, we are doing these acts to Jesus.

God IS merciful to you. In Jesus He forgives you all of your sin. Today you come to the Altar to receive this forgiveness. It is given freely, by grace, no strings attached. Freely you receive mercy, so that you can now readily be merciful to others just as Jesus is merciful to you.

And so in thanks to Him who loves us, we offer our lives to Him as living sacrifices. In the New Testament, today includes the monetary offerings we give, but not just these. We also offer to God our sacrifices of praise and

thanksgiving. Indeed our whole lives are now offered as sacrifices to the Lord, dedicating ourselves to God, to serving Him by loving others not just in words but also in acts of love.

So now in Jesus let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that confess His name, not neglecting to do good, sharing what we have, for these are the sacrifices that are pleasing to God. In Jesus' name.

Amen