

Worship at home
May 9, 2021

Sixth Sunday of Easter



<https://dementiasolutions.ca/wandering-dementia-making-sense-of-it/>

God calls us to worship

The Lord is risen!

Hallelujah! He is risen indeed!

Hymn: #425 “We praise you, O God”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wYMO9vPXtQ>

We bring our praise and confessions

Holy God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

When Adam and Eve chose to reject you,

you chose to call them, and clothe them.

When Cain chose to ignore your words and embrace chaos,

you chose to protect him in his wandering.

Through the generations you have faithfully called out to your people,
renewed their garments, and offered them refuge in your presence.

For our sake you chose to reject the glory of heaven,

and enter our human life as a man;

for our sake you chose to forgo the joy of Holy Life,

and endure the cross.

And so, this morning we offer to you our praise and prayers.

We give you our lives,

we turn to you in faith.

And yet, we confess that all too often

our priorities lead us away from you.

We seek our own security on our own terms

rather trusting you and looking to the needs of others.

We fulfill our own desires
rather than act for the common good.

We justify our own interests
and fail to understand the cost they take on the earth and other people.

Forgive us.

Redirect our priorities and renew our commitment to live out your love,
finding our strength to do so in the faith that you give through the sacrifice and
resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

In his name we pray,

Amen.

God assures us of his forgiveness

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ—
And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us; Christ reigns in power for us; Christ prays for
us. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and
made new by God's generous grace.

In response to the gospel, we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried,
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

*If you are a member or adherent of either of the Moore Presbyterian congregations,
please remember to submit your offering to the appropriate treasurer. For contact
information, speak with Rev. Ian.*

God speaks to us through his Word

Reading the Beginnings through Resurrection Lenses: Faith Matters

This is our final sermon in the series “Reading the Beginnings through Resurrection Lenses” and we have made our way to the fourth chapter in Genesis. The opening section of Genesis actually ends at the end of chapter 5 which leads into the story of Noah. However, next Sunday is Ascension Sunday and the following is Pentecost and I want to change our focus during the season of Pentecost, so, we’ll end this series with Genesis 4.

READ GENESIS 4:1-26

HEBREWS 11:1-8, 32-38; 12:1-2

The slogan of the seminary I attended is: Faith Matters.

Increasingly, hospitals and the medical profession are recognizing the value of faith in healing. Although it varies in different hospitals, more emphasis is being placed on the spiritual care aspect of healing and on partnerships between chaplains, community spiritual care providers, and the medical teams. Hospitals are recognizing the value of faith in healing – that people with faith tend to recover better, and accept their situation better than those without.

Similarly, the facilitator of the GriefShare program we run in partnership with the other Corunna churches has told me that throughout his many years as a bereavement counsellor, in both faith-based and secular contexts, he has observed that individuals who grieve through the lens of faith are able to work through their grief and reach some level of equilibrium and healing faster than those with no faith.

Faith matters.

1. In Genesis 4 we encounter Adam and Eve beginning their lives outside of the garden of Eden. Eve, the Mother of all Living gave birth to her first two sons: Cain and Abel.

Abel became a keeper of sheep and Cain became a tiller of the ground. And, in time, they both brought offerings to the Lord.

It might seem puzzling to you that God would prefer Abel's offering over that of his brother. After all, they had different vocations and so they each gave of the fruit of their unique labours: Cain gave fruit of the ground, Abel gave fruit of the flock.

Why did God prefer the one over the other?

There are two details in the story which we need to notice. Firstly, Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock" whereas Cain simply brought "an offering." The difference is that an offering of the firstling or, the first fruit) is a sign of faith that the Lord will provide what we need to survive. This was an important qualifier for the sacrifices offered in worship by Noah and Abraham and later the Israelite people in the tabernacle and in the temple. And, it is also a foundational qualifier for our own theology of financial offerings. When we give our offerings, we are not paying a membership fee or merely contributing to the upkeep of the building and associated expenses, we are making an offering to the Lord God. So, we give "off the top", before any money is budgeted for food, shelter, or paying taxes. We give the *first* fruits, the first dollars of our pay check because we have faith in the Lord's mercy/the Lord's providence and trust he will provide what we need.

First fruits/firstlings also affirms that everything comes from God and belongs to God. It is not ours; we are stewards in God's name.

Whereas Cain simply gave an offering of whatever was most convenient, Abel gave of the firstlings of his flock.

Secondly, Abel brought the fat of his lambs. In the sacrificial system the fat of the offering was burned. As the fragrant smoke of the fat sizzling on the grill rose and filled the air, the worshippers knew that such an offering was pleasing to the Lord.¹

Abel's offering showed thoughtfulness and faith. He prepared himself to come into God's presence and he trusted in God's providence.

Cain's offering, demonstrated thoughtlessness, maybe apathy, maybe complacency. A demonstrated lack of respect, a half-hearted attempt to show what God

¹ Leviticus 3:16; Leviticus 7:22.

was worth to him. And no faith. He didn't trust God to provide for him and so he saved his best produce for the market.

When God then rejected Cain's attempt, Cain became angry. Cain's anger manifested in feelings of resentment, perhaps humiliation, and jealousy. And, just as many of us are wont to do, he reacted to these feelings with the 'fight' reaction (in his case, physical violence) and the 'flight' reaction (avoidance.) "Am I my brother's keeper?" he asked. He was fleeing from responsibility. The irony in his question is based on Genesis 1 and 2 and the partnerships and co-operations that are established therein, Yes, we are our brothers' keeper.

After murdering Abel and failing to take responsibility, like his parents before him, Cain was exiled from his farmland and forced to live the life of a wanderer. He eventually and rather ironically *settled* in the land of Nod, which means 'wandering'. This evokes a very discontented feeling, an existential angst: a *farmer*, driven from his soil and forced to *wander*, *settles* in the land of *Wandering* where he built a *city*!

There, in the land of Wandering, in this discontented context, Cain built a city, raised a son, and set in motion the development of what we might call civilization:

Jabal – became the ancestor of agriculture,

Jubal – became the ancestor of the arts; specifically, music,

Tubal-Cain – became the ancestor of manufacturing (made all kinds of bronze and iron tools.)

Cain's angst and reactionary response to negative feelings are ingrained even now in civilizations, and in the privacy of individual minds and hearts. They contribute to our resistance to forgive and our desire for vengeance, to uphold our pride of place such as was sung by Lamech. The feelings themselves are neither good nor bad, they're a natural consequence of living; but the reactions disrupt the order, harmony, and complementary co-operation that characterizes God's world of Genesis 1 and 2.

Unlike the creation of the garden, the creation of civilization is fraught with angst, and discontent!

And yet, as was the case with his parents when God chose to clothe them in spite of their rejection of Him; so too, in spite of Cain's actions, God reaches across the divide and continues to offer Cain his protection.

2. Over the past few weeks, we've been trying to Read the Beginnings through Resurrection Lenses and asking the question: Why do creation stories matter for 21st century disciples Jesus?

One of the things we learn is that Scripture is not primarily interested in answering the "how" questions: How do atoms come together? How do forces interact? How do cells divide and multiply? These are important questions. Through scientific inquiry, God reveals the "How."

However, the story of scripture is the revelation of Why?
Why does God create?
Why is human society plagued with angst and anger?
Why does God intervene?
Why does God not leave us to the chaos of entropy and the fight/flight/freeze reactions of Cain?

3. As we read the story, we leave Cain struggling to find rest in the land of Wandering, and follows an alternate track.

Eve gave birth to another son. Seth. Seth had a son named Enosh and, "At that time people began to invoke the name of the Lord."

When you take the time to continue reading the genealogies in Genesis 5 and again in chapters 9, 10, and 11, you learn that the branch of the family tree extending from Seth and Enosh contains an individual named Enoch (a different Enoch from Cain's son) about whom is the first mention of someone who "walked with God" (5:22). From Enoch the genealogy continues to Noah and eventually Abram/Abraham, the father of faith.

Against the backdrop of Cain's lack of faith and the associated chaos, we see another family line beginning who "invoked the name of the Lord" and who "walked with God."

This is the narrative followed by the rest of Scripture. It's the story of Seth and his descendants. Of Enosh and Enoch, Noah and Abraham. Of invoking the name of the Lord. Of walking with God. Of floods and renewals; of covenant and Law; of exile

and restoration; of cross and empty tomb. It's the story that focusses our attention on Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and then spreads around the globe in the church and ultimately in the renewal of the heavens and the earth.

The narrative of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is a narrative that draws us into a life of faith.

And a particularly unique faith. Faith in the living and triune God who “rescues us from the power of darkness and transfers us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.”²

4. Stories of beginnings give direction to our wandering; a path and purpose for our faith.

The Christian faith is an historical faith. It has withstood, deepened, and expanded through wars and famines, droughts and fires, depressions, plagues, and pandemics. The Christian faith is not subject to the changing winds of culture, but is anchored deep in the lives and witnesses of countless generations of men, women, and children who had names, who loved, who cried, and who created.

Faith is the gift the Lord God uses to form order and harmony in our hearts as we, in Jesus' name, “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” and bear witness to the order, harmony, and beauty of God even in the midst of the chaos of Cain. Amen.

Hymn #685/686 “How firm a foundation”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Prb4C_PewWM

² Colossians 1:13.

We respond with faith and service

God of our lives and our loving,
We thank you for the signs of resurrection that are all around us,
showing that life is stronger than death.
Give us the grace to recognize and embrace the gifts of new life
that your love makes possible for us all,
as we pray for your resurrecting power to renew the world amid all its challenges.

God of home and family,
today we thank you for our families,
especially for our mothers and grandmothers.
We are grateful for their love and attention, their hard work
and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us.
We honour before you each mother, grandmother and great grandmother
who has died;
and we pray for all those who have felt isolated from their families
in these months of pandemic.
Reunite us in your love.

God of connections and compassion,
Today we thank you for our friends and relations,
for the neighbours and fellow citizens who help to make our lives complete.
We thank you for smiles shared, helping hands offered, commitments honoured. And
we pray for all those around us who are facing particular challenges this day...
(Keep a brief silence)

Restore our hope with your love.

God of courage and new possibility,
Today we pray for all those who have felt life or love slipping through their fingers in the
times of distancing we've had to endure,
and for those who have struggled with their physical or mental health,
whatever the reason.
We pray for communities trying to sort out how to recover from the pandemic
and for all those worried about their personal future.
Encourage us with your love.

God of forgiveness and renewal:
Today we pray for those whose relationships are need of repair
and for all who work for peace and reconciliation in the face of deep divisions.
We pray for families, churches, communities and countries facing conflict,
and ask that your Spirit open hearts and minds to deeper understanding.
Reconcile us through your love.

As friends and followers of Jesus, we offer the words he taught us,
precious to the whole family that claims his love:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn #665 "Lord Jesus, you shall be my song"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgwGPPM2ytc>

God sends us with His blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace. Amen.