

We bow our hearts in prayer: Lord Jesus, As Thy coming was in peace, Quiet, full of gentleness, Let the same mind dwell in me That was ever found in Thee.... Bruise for me the serpent's head That, set free from doubt and dread, I may cling to Thee in faith, Safely kept through life and death, Amen. ^(ELH #165:6,8)

Dear Fellow Redeemed, Forgiven and Pardoned Murderers,

That's a hard title to bear, isn't it? A murderer...

I am guessing that you don't often lump yourself into that category.

"Murderer" is such a harsh word. It's appropriate for people like Cain and King Herod, but not for Christian folk like us....

Except that we are murderers... by the Bible's definition.

We have committed the same loveless thoughts and words,

and even some of the same loveless actions as these infamous characters.

So how is it that the Lord is so gracious as to redeem, forgive and pardon you, a murderer?

It is the same reason that He has pardoned other murderers, like Moses and King David.

It is by the infinitely guiltless blood of Jesus that was shed to save the world from our bloody sins.

Today, we will consider the 5th Commandment in light of the account of Cain and Abel.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, You have driven me today away from the ground, and from Your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

In the biblical narrative, the step from eating a forbidden fruit to the first murder is quick.

Abel's murder is reported in Gen. 4, immediately after Adam's eating in chapter 3.

But there was some development that led to the murder, and examining that development will help us to realize the very real and dangerous nature of the sins we often consider small and unimportant.

“In the course of time...” we’re told, the beginning of this murder took place.
What had started it, wasn’t even a wrong that Abel had committed against Cain.
It was simply this: **“the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,
but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.”**

What caused that distinction we are told in the letter to the Hebrews (11:4&6):

**By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...
And without faith it is impossible to please Him.**

It was the faith – in the promised Messiah – that separated them.
Abel’s sacrifice was offered in faith, while Cain’s was not.

So the beginning of Abel’s murder was not anger or hatred or jealousy, but unbelief.
But don’t think that Cain was an atheist, denying the existence of God.

In His mercy, God had even come to him, to warn him about the sin growing within him.
No, Cain’s unbelief revolved around the promised Savior.
He did not believe, did not care, that a Savior would be born to take away His sins.

We see this come out strongly when God confronted him after the murder was committed.
Never once does he exhibit sorrow for his sin. Never once does he plead for forgiveness.
Instead, he lies about not knowing where his brother is,
denies any responsibility for Abel’s well-being,
and complains about the severity of his banishment and the potential for deadly retribution.

His unbelief then paved the way for other sins to follow.

Since God would not regard Cain’s, but did regard Abel’s sacrifice,
Cain’s jealousy of God’s favor turned toward Abel, and so was his festering anger & hatred.
St. John tells us why Cain did it: **Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.**

1John3:12

We see the same thing happening in our Gospel text, where Herod, devious and suspicious,
ordered the murders of the innocent baby boys of Bethlehem, and the promised Messiah,
They, and He, had not wronged their king, but Herod’s own deeds were evil.

These two examples seem far removed from what we normally expect among a Christian cong.,
so how is it that we are to be labeled along with them as murderers?

It is because we have the same sinful inclinations living within us.

St. John says rather directly, **Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.** 1John3:11-16

But that word, “hate” is a strong word... Some of you know the strength of that word.

You have felt its sharp teeth tearing at you, eating you from the inside out.

You have seen how it motivates your desires, conversations, and actions.

And it is a dark emotion that does not let go easily, but desires to feed itself
with every little perceived or intended wrong, hurt, or act of animosity.

If it is allowed to fester, it will leave you loveless, without empathy, murderous and dead in sin.

But for others, that same word “hatred” can seem too strong of a word.

You can't think of anyone that you have such animosity toward that you consider it hatred.
There are people you don't get along with, people you disagree with, but... it's not hatred.
While this is certainly a blessing, that you don't wrestle with such strong feelings,
this does not mean that you are guiltless.

God can still turn to you and ask, as He did with Cain, "**Where is your brother...**

...whom you have killed with your sharp words and **insults**?"

...whom you have slayed with your quick temper and unjustified **anger**?" Matthew 5:21-22

...whom you have left *unbefriended*, without *help* and in *need*?" (Explanation to the 5th Com.)

...who, if it were for your lovelessness alone, would be left for dead, unattended and dying?"

Is it also true that you have willfully, purposefully even, snuffed out a life?

Who for fear or ignorance, or even knowingly, have stopped the life of an unborn child?

Or have assisted in intentionally shortening a person's life, under the ruse of a "dignified death"?

As your mind races, thinking of your thoughts, words and actions,

not only that you have done in jealousy, anger, fear, or hatred...

but even what you have left undone in showing mercy, kindness, and love,

God's other question to Cain looms heavy, "**What have you done?**"

But consider just as seriously His Christmas exclamation, "**Fear not, for behold,**

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people [even murderers],

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

It's as if God said, "No longer consider what you have done, but look instead to what I have done."

He has sent Jesus, the Savior that Cain rejected.

The Savior that, though sought by Herod to be murdered,

would have given and protected Herod's eternal life.

The Savior that saved the life of His neighbors on Moses' behalf.

The Savior that by His death, has put away King David's sin.

The Savior that literally took the place of the murderer Barabbas upon the cross,

so that he might go free and live.

This same Jesus is your Savior as well.

He is not a savior made of straw, who forgives only those sins that we consider small/insignificant.

He is your Savior made of flesh and blood, as you are, to bear in Himself all your sins,

including those sins you consider great, or even unforgivable.

He has feared and loved God in perfect righteousness

so that He did no *bodily harm to His neighbor*, even when insulted, beaten, and crucified,

but *helped and befriended us in every need*, according to His divine and eternal goodness,

mercy and love.

This He did for you, so that you might have and live in His righteousness, love, & mercy forever.

In carnal fear, Cain sought God's protection from those who would seek vengeance for Abel,
and even to him, the unrepentant murderer, God gave a sign of protection.

But for you, the Lord has reserved far more blessed signs and promises of protection,

for He has given to you His sign and seal of Baptism, by which your jealousies, fears,

hatreds, unkindnesses, lovelessnesses and murders have been forever washed away.

And to you, the repentant murderers, He gives the blood of Jesus, shed in self-sacrifice,

for the forgiveness of your sins. So take, eat, and drink of It. Receive His forgiveness.
Be comforted, that the Lord, who has been the victim, is also the Victor over death,
and gives to you a new life to live in perfect fear and love of God and neighbor.

*Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains Poured for me the life-blood From His sacred veins.
Abel's blood for vengeance, Pleaded to the skies; But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries.* ^{ELH #283:4}

Soli Deo Gloria