Text: Gen 4

**Introduction**

Given that I’ve had David and Ethan sleeping on the floor of my parents living room for a few months, I’m grateful that one of those brothers has not killed the other one yet. I’m also grateful that nobody has yet called Child Protective Services on us or the local Home Owner’s Association.

Our Old Testament Lesson today on the basic level captures something obviously as old as the first sibling – sibling rivalry. Each dyad: brothers and sisters, sisters and sisters, and brothers and brothers, tends to have its own unique forms of rivalry. It might be unique to brother and brother to escalate to murder. That doesn’t mean the others can’t get bad in their own ways.

**Literal**

Now that sibling rivalry can often start where I think it does in our text. Genesis 3:15 is often quoted as the first promise of Christ. Speaking to Satan the Serpent God says “I wlll put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will bruise his heal.” Offspring is singular. The promise waits for a singular son of Eve. Which is exactly what I think Eve was thinking in what she says at the start of our text. “I have received The Man with the help of the LORD.” This isn’t just any man or son. Eve thinks she has received the son of the promise. The one who will crush the head of Satan. And then she conceives again and it’s just Abel.

Son’s try and please Fathers and Mothers. Fathers and Mothers place all kinds of expectations on children and sons. Up to and including that this one is the golden child, the one that will save us, the one of all the expectations. I think that is what is floating around in the Cain and Abel story. Cain was “The Man”. This was “The Man” who was supposed to win back the approval of God by crushing the serpent. Abel is just Abel.

And when they come to bring their offerings. Cain needs the approval of God to also meet the expectations of mom. Now you’ve probably heard sermons where preachers have tried to make distinctions about Cain’s offering and Abel’s. Cain brought an offering of the first fruit while Abel brought the firstborn and their fat portions. I don’t think that distinction is in there. And it would set up the wrong comparison anyway. Because we are not saved by the quality of our offerings. We are not saved by our works. And that would be the natural conclusion if Cain’s offering was rejected because of its quality. The both brought acceptable offerings based on their vocations. God’s lack of regard for Cain’s I believe is for it’s purpose.

Abel brings his simply as Abel in thanks. He has not been weighted with the family’s expectation. His offering is one of grace. Cain’ is a quid pro quo. The test if God is with him and if he can satisfy mom’s expectations now. God, I have brought my offerings, now you give me the strength to defeat the serpent. It’s the thinking of the law. If I keep it well, God will favor me. And God has no regard for offerings of the law. The are good and wise, but we will never satisfy God – or our family – by the law. God – and families – are things of grace.

Cain is bearing the load of being “The One”. Which is not a load he can bear. It is not a load that any of us can bear. We are not “The One.” And bearing such a load produces anger. But Cain can’t be angry at mom, because that is mom. And Cain can’t be angry at God. Although to master sin in this case would be to go to each of them about their expectations. But instead Cain takes it out on his brother. Not because of any wrong Abel had done to Cain, but out of envy. Envy at the lack of expectation. Envy at the ease of grace.

Abel’s blood calls out for justice. And the LORD is a just God. Cain is punished. But again Cain misses the grace. He asks for mercy. And there is an important distinction between mercy and grace. Mercy is not receiving what we deserve. Cain knows that in committing murder he deserves a violent death himself. He asks for mercy and the Lord is merciful. He marks Cain as a sign of his mercy. But the problem with mercy is that Cain is still a wanderer. What Cain needed was grace. Grace is receiving what we do not deserve.

**Christological**

What we don’t deserve is a brother who is our keeper. Yet that is what we have been given in Jesus Christ. Jesus is our brother and he has watched over us to the extend of giving himself on that cross. As the our first hymn has it, Abel’s blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies, but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.

We don’t deserve pardon, but in his blood we have it. We don’t deserve a brother like Jesus, but we have been given one.

We may not be a full blown case as Abel, but as Jesus would say about the 5th commandment in the Sermon on the mount, “anyone who is angry with his brother, or insults him, is liable for hell.” And we’ve all been there. If we want to argue justice. You end up with the entire world heading to hell. If we want to plead for mercy, it’s a better choice. But it is limited.

What we have is a brother looking out for us who have brought us the grace of God. In Christ we have been given the kingdom we never deserved.

**Moral**

The moral question then becomes how do we live out of that grace? And the short answer is we follow Christ. We are our brother’s keeper. What does that mean?

Well it probably starts with granting everyone in our own family a bit of grace. Yes, none of them deserve it. That’s the point.

And this isn’t a call to pay it forward. If you expect to get paid back by anyone other than God on the last day, it isn’t grace.

This is a request to put down the anger. Yes, maybe mom or dad expected more from you than was right. Forgive them. Yes, maybe your brother or sister is a complete basket case – you fill in the type of basket. They are still yours. Be the brother or sister they don’t deserve. And don’t get angry when they don’t change. They won’t. Yeah, it’s not right. Neither was that cross.

How do we live out of the grace of our brother Jesus Christ, by occasionally trying to be graceful. Start close to home. Those families are things of grace.

**Eschatological**

Eve’s hope was for that Man who would defeat the serpent she was deceived by. And Christ The Man has defeated Satan. But our hope is that our brother is on the heavenly throne, and one day that Kingdom will come in all its fullness.

Today we live by grace. Sin crouches at our door. We walk in danger all the way. But tomorrow? Satan’s lying ceases. Our envy and strife and jealousy will be completely unmasked for the foolishness they are. And our brother will welcome us home to the harvest we couldn’t produce while we wandered. Amen.