

Listen again to part of our story from Genesis, but listen as if you’ve never heard the story before: *Cain said to Abel his brother, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord God said to Cain, “Where is your brother?”*

Stop right there – because if this is your first time hearing the story, I can imagine the story teller pausing after the question, and we’re waiting: “What will Cain say?”

What might have happened if Cain had been honest with God? What if Cain had said, “Yes, I know where my brother is.”

You see, justice requires us to be honest – to stand up and tell the truth when the whole world want us to be deaf and blind.

What might have happened if Cain had been honest with God – had accepted responsibility for what he had done?

Would the world have been different if he had told God the truth: *Abel is dead; I killed him; he is in the field; his blood is on my hands.*

What could have been an act of confession and repentance – Cain lied, “I don’t know.”

Or as Eugene Peterson has it in “The Message”: *How should I know? Am I his babysitter?*

But the truth is, as Burt Visotzky, Old Testament scholar, notes: *This answer “turns out be the seed of all our ethics because the answer for every reader is: “Yes, of course, you’re your brother’s keeper.”*

What we have in our story in Genesis is that only a few short paragraphs separated from the paradise God had created, humans have created a violent world.

Did it disturb you as it did me to hear this story of murder and lies read by a young person?

Yet, this is the story they see and hear every day of their young life.

Cain is the story of the world they are inheriting from us. We live in deceitful, violent times.

Where is your brother?

God raises the question and what’s at stake is our humanity: what it means to be human in God’s creation, of living in community with other creatures of God.

That’s what the issue is as Cain asks, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The word translated “keeper” is the same word God used in the creation of human beings. God say that humans were to work and to care for – that is, to keep – God’s creation.

But Cain has not guarded God’s creation. He’s not taken care of his brother. He has destroyed his brother and, thus, destroyed the creation of God.

Cain’s violence against his brother, Cain’s dishonesty before God, gives us his version of humanity, of living with other human creatures of God.

And it is because we live Cain’s answer today that we cannot hide from God’s question, “Where is your brother?”

This question does not repress the violence of our world, but unmasks it, denounces it, condemns it.

Look at the story: God warns Cain about his choices: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door...”

But not even God is able to talk Cain out of his sin. The choice belongs to Cain. The choice belongs to you and me.

Just look at the gods of fear, anger, deceit and manipulation and violence that have become the new world religion – at least in America.

If we follow their lead and believe their illusions, we will not only live in the midst of growing violence but will also abandon our commitment to the Prince of Peace.

It can happen to any of us. It has happened to some of us. It is a temptation to all of us who have secret angers and not so secret resentments and sometimes find it hard to believe that God wants what I have to give, that God loves us as we are, where we are.

We fall prey to the idolatrous illusion that defiantly expressing our own dogmatic and differing opinions, strutting about as if we have all the answers in our lives and in our homes and in our public places and in our conversations and in our politics and in our religion, will make us safe, prove our worthiness of purity and perfection, and secure our way of life before God.

The Bible calls this frustrated sputtering, this living of the lie, this dishonesty before God “cursing,” and it happens easily, quite apart from any four-letter words we may or may not use.

“Cursing is an attitude in action,” says Robert Morris. It includes all our ways of seeking power by excluding, diminishing, destroying the opposition.

Just look at us in our country, we have armed ourselves beyond all reason with weapons of our graceless dishonesty, our assault on the truth of God’s love in Jesus Christ: guns and greed, rage and bitterness, hurt pride and sharp tongues, arrogance, selfishness, stupidity.

Our fear and our pride are a toxic mix that pulls the trigger of hate and anger, in terms of our story – we leave them lying to die in the field.

“Where is your brother?”

What this question does is to affirm that all human beings are connected as God's images. A radical, revolutionary, redeeming question for how we live with one another in this world.

This biblical question sets the framework for the foundation of all our social and political and economic and emotional relationships.

As Alden Solovy puts it in his prayer:

*The man in the gutter,
The woman on the street,
They are my sister and my brother.*

*The frail and the meek,
The lonely and the lost,
They are my father and my mother.*

*The soldier under fire,
The girl in a wheelchair,
They are my son and my daughter.*

*The widow and the orphan,
The confused and the lost,
They are my cousins and my friends.*

*God of justice,
Only You know why one man is born for silk
And another man is born for sand.
Only You know why one woman is born for
castles
And another is born for cardboard.*

*God of mercy,
Grant me the wisdom and compassion
To see all men and women
As my family and kin.*

*Help me to use the gifts of my life
As blessings to share.
Grant me compassion for those in need:
The suffering, the hungry,
Those in pain,
Those in fear.
Lead me to a path
Of love and healing.
In service to Your Holy Name.*

Every man, woman, and child is a human being. Not this one more and the other one less. Not this one is valuable and the other one is worthless.

Where is your brother, your sister?

Jesus shows us what it means to answer honestly about where our brothers and sisters are, what it means to be human, what it means to be responsible for other humans.

Jesus is the 'honest to God' keeper of God's creatures and creation!

He cured people; he fed people; He restored the poor and the oppressed and the outcast to community, gave them a place in society.

Health, Hunger, Home – Basic answers of what Jesus believed is at stake for being human, for how we care for each other in community.

Is that the foundation of Christian character in our lives, what it means to be set free by the truth of Jesus Christ...

With whether or not Jesus Christ is powerful to us, is a motivating force, transforming our lives so that we find increasingly day by day that we cannot get his words, his ways, his way of life, out of our minds or our hearts.

Where is your brother, your sister?

Thank God for every servant of Jesus Christ who has answered that question truly and courageously and journeyed into the dangerous places populated with dangerous people to open up truth and to bring peace and justice to our world.

Thank God for the men and women of our own day who have answered that question and still stand for the truth which Christ has brought us and who work for the future he has promised us.

Where is your brother, where is your sister?

Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass lived and died to that question. Mahatmas Gandhi and Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr. - all devoted their lives to that question.

It is the question for Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin, for Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan and Nancy Pelosi, Nathan Deal and Donald Trump.

Where is your brother, your sister?

And if they are honest to God, how different the world could be.

It is the question for Bruce Lancaster, a question for each one of you... Where is your brother, your sister?

I hope and pray our answer would be radically repentant, redeemingly honest to keep us on the path that the world might be different.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.