

**“FROM ENVY TO TRUST”**  
Genesis 4:1-9 – Matthew 16:21-28  
Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill  
Babcock Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, July 15, 2012

The story of Cain murdering his brother Abel has everything to do with Jesus' command, **“Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.”** The Cain and Abel story is the first recorded case of sibling rivalry. Cain is envious because his brother Abel has something he doesn't. So Cain got so angry that he killed his brother. Too bad Cain didn't stop to realize that whenever you compare yourself to someone else you always lose, at least in your own mind.

A book entitled “Ambition” tells about this man who sold his business for \$10 million and moved to Florida to enjoy his new life. But he couldn't enjoy himself because his neighbors turned out to be richer than he was. Can you imagine, not being happy with \$10 million? If you think this guy is foolish let's put it in perspective. I know you don't consider yourself fabulously wealthy, in fact, you'd probably say you're just making it, especially when you compare what you have with those who have more.

Would it surprise you then if I told you there are millions of people in the world, seeing us coveting our neighbor's goods only to conclude you and I are foolish because they see us as having everything?

Don't we think, **“If I had a better job with a higher salary, a bigger house and a nicer car, plus a country club membership I'd never complain about anything again?”** That's what we think, but let's get real, we'd still be unhappy because we'd be basing our happiness on what we covet, and if you get what you covet, before too long you covet for more. It's like being addicted to drugs, the more you get the more you want.

But there's Good News. Jesus shows how to become truly contented and spiritually healthy human beings created in the image of God. But not surprisingly, Jesus shows us a way you or I wouldn't choose on our own.

When Jesus told his disciples he was going to Jerusalem to die, Peter went ballistic. **“God forbid it Lord, this must never happen!”** A little earlier Jesus finally admitted to the twelve that indeed he was the Christ, leaving the disciples ecstatic. Finally, God was sending his main man to set things straight and stride on to the world scene and do wonderful things for God's people! Isn't that what we all want, even today, a leader who will make our nation great, lift our spirits, raise up our standard of living and make us the envy of the rest of the world?

That's what Peter was looking for in Jesus, but finding Peter's way too tempting Jesus reacted violently, **“Get behind me Satan you are a stumbling block to me.”** Calling Peter Satan should tell us something: Jesus wasn't immune from temptation and

could have gone either way because Jesus was dangerously close to rejecting the way of the cross and becoming an envy driven Messiah. This wasn't the first time Jesus was tempted in this way. Remember Jesus' temptations in the wilderness? Satan tempted Jesus to give into envy and have it all. He showed Jesus all the world and its wealth and said, **"All this is yours if you bow down and worship me."** Now, in this latest temptation Satan was using Peter to get to Jesus. Can you imagine how terrible it would have been if Jesus caved?

Question: What would've happened if Peter did convince Jesus to put the issue to a vote resulting in the disciples unanimously opposing any talk of the cross? Jesus would have then gone to Plan B, preaching a more user friendly gospel to win over the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Sadducees. Next, Jesus would reach out to Pontius Pilate and make nice with him. Impressed, Pilate would then convince Rome to name Jesus the Prince of Jerusalem.

A new golden age would dawn in Israel. Culture and literature flourishes, everyone's standard of living rises, there's peace, plenty, and contentment, until at 66 years of age Jesus suddenly dies of a stroke. Peter suddenly recalls Jesus' final words as he stood by his bedside. Jesus recalled that day in Caesura Philippi, thirty years earlier, when he gave into Peter instead of going up to Jerusalem to be crucified. Then with his last breath, Jesus died wondering if he made the right choice. All the great accomplishments made during Jesus' lifetime have already started to fall apart. There's renewed competition between the surviving disciples, a Cain and Abel sibling rivalry brewing as each, once again, claims to be the greatest. Still, Peter muses, **"it was great while it lasted."**

That's what could have happened, but it didn't.

Thankfully, Jesus, despite Peter's opposition, kept walking towards Jerusalem and even though they didn't want to hear it Jesus continued to preach self denial and servanthood. **"If you want to follow me then deny yourself and take up your cross."** That's the traditional translation but listen to this one by Gene Peterson. **"Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat. I am. Follow me and I'll show you self help is no help at all. Self sacrifice is the only way, my way to finding, your true self."**

As I said earlier, Jesus' way isn't what we'd normally choose. Our natural inclination is to avoid making any sacrifice unless there's something in it for us. We don't want to give, we'd rather take. We don't want to be servants, we'd rather be masters. That was Peter's way when he stood up to Jesus and said **"No."** But the results of our way are temporary at best. It may be "great while it lasts," but sooner or later our way falls apart. What's more, even when you're on top, the envy never stops. You always are hungry for more.

So how to escape this vicious cycle? First, recognize that deep intense hunger for more and more is actually a misplaced hunger for God. Second, being envious for what you don't have needs to be replaced with what you do have, Christ who shows you how to

give yourself away. You deny anything that keeps you from giving yourself to Jesus. Picking up your cross means your behavior changes, you willingly do something that costs you something because it's the right thing to do. It may not be convenient, you'll have to put yourself out there, but you give yourself away anyway. And the more you give yourself away you find your competitive envious nature wither away and slowly die.

In Alcoholics Anonymous there is a saying, **"If nothing changes, nothing changes."** In other words, to become more like Jesus and less like Cain or Peter something must change. So, start changing. Give into Jesus and let him help you pick up your cross. Start visiting the widowed shut-in across the street. Spend more time with your family, love them and watch over them. Help that colleague at work look good even if it takes the spot light off yourself. Teach a Sunday School class, befriend that troubled kid in your neighborhood, increase your financial giving to the church, volunteer your time in a soup kitchen. Of course, you can't do it all, so find one thing you do well and do it for Jesus. Make a few changes in your life and experience the transformation God makes in your soul.

Making these changes is the beginning of self denial, an act of faith as you trust Jesus and his way with your life. Note that word trust! If you really want to escape your competitive, envy driven lifestyle learn to trust Jesus and give him your life. Again, if nothing changes, nothing changes.

The stories of Cain and Peter along with your own story informs us that when you trust only in yourself the results bring on disaster, but when you trust Christ, listen to his still small voice and follow his will, even though it costs you, your life will be saved as you enter a deeper level of faith with the result you become more like Jesus. You stop being your brothers' rival and start becoming your brothers' keeper by putting flesh on Christ's gospel and intentionally live and serve in his name. And when you get more in sync with the presence of Christ living in you, that's when you'll sense transformation from being a sibling rival to a sibling keeper.

Let us pray!