

CRIBB<S>NOTE - JANUARY 24, 2010

What comes first in your life? What is the most important thing to you? What are you willing to give away that has great significance to you?

There is a television commercial in which a man and woman sit at a table and have a conversation. The woman asks the man if she and his dog were hanging over a cliff and he could only save one of them, which one would he save. The man responds he would save her and apologizes to his dog. The woman then asks if he had to make a similar choice between her and his mother, who he would save. Again he answers he would save her. She presses him a third time and asks if he had to choose between saving her and his beer, which one would he save, and he replies, "How high is the cliff."

In the Biblical story about the first two sons of Adam and Eve, Cain, the elder, was a farmer and his younger brother, Abel, was a shepherd. Both made sacrifices to God. Cain kept the best of his crops for himself and gave God what was left over. Abel always took his fattest lamb, the best of the flock, and gave it to God first. God blessed Abel more than Cain. That angered Cain so much he decided to kill his brother.

God warned Cain about his anger and asked, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4: 6b-7 NRSV)

Cain's problems stemmed from his misplaced priorities. He put himself above God. He kept the best that he had to himself and offered the scraps to God. Does that sound familiar? Do you keep the best that you have to yourself? Do you protect your precious treasure and give your spare change to God? Abel, on the other hand, realized he owed everything to God. He took his very best and gave it first. As a result, he received more and experienced God's acceptance and blessings.

There is a lesson in the brief account of our earliest ancestors. Although tragedy is rooted in the story as jealousy, envy, and greed conspired to murder the innocent one, we cannot miss the point about getting our priorities right. Putting God first leads to ordering our lives correctly. We lose nothing by giving away to God the best that we have to offer.

What does God ask of us? First, to acknowledge life comes from a Source that cares deeply about our welfare. God loves every person so much and has a great desire for all people to experience the joy of life. That means we must take time to rest, relax, and worship the One who is Sacred. We need to be conscious of God's desire for us.

Second, everything we have comes from God. It is impossible to lose anything when we give our best back to God. Whatever we give to God comes back in multiples.

There is a song we used to sing in church titled, "You Can't Beat God Giving." We march to the altar, placed our offering and sang, "You can't beat God giving no matter how you try. The more you give the more God gives to you. Just keep on giving because it's really true: you can't beat God giving no matter how you try."

The 'law of reciprocity' is adjusted in our favor when we give like Abel. God delights when we give and live fully. But, it is not enough to give just to receive more. That is not the purpose of the story. Instead, we are reminded of God's goodness and faithfulness. When we give away our possessions and money to honor God, we make life better for others. God wants everyone to experience a good life. Selfishness and greed stifle life and smother the human spirit. That is what got Cain into trouble.

We still get into trouble when we become obsessed with our stuff. Greed is insatiable. No matter how much we have greed requires more. Someone once asked a very wealthy man how much was enough. The rich man said, "Just a little more." Greed blinds us from our blessings. No matter how much we have we feel it is not enough. We can become fearful of each other; afraid somebody is going to take away what we have.

Jesus offers an antidote to such worries, "From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them

again....Do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High.” (Luke 6:29b-30; 35b NRSV)

We do not need to look back to the Creation story to realize the consequences of misappropriation and misplaced priorities. We witness the travesty of greed and callous attitudes toward humanity and the environment. Many people are suffering and struggling to make ends meet because of policies and practices that deny them opportunities to participate in the fullness of life. The example of Cain saturates societies around the world without exemption.

Think about your choices when it comes to your possessions. Do you put God first? Does Abel present an example for your life? What can you do to be more acceptable to God? Think about it.