

Text: Genesis 4:1-16. Sixth Sunday of Easter. **May 25, 2014.**

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Bad habits are really hard to break, aren't they? I have to confess, I get easily distracted and yes, even addicted to games. I ask my sons, "What's the coolest game out now?" And they download it to my phone and next thing, I'm spending way too much time playing. It started with Candy Crush, a game you can never finish. Then a little flappy bird. Then when I realized I would never have a higher score than my boys, I went back to Candy Crush, where I am at a far higher level than they are. Then I defeated 2048 in about a week. Then it's back to Candy Crush. Then, you get the picture. Maybe these bad habits seem harmless, and fun, but what about when the habit is an addiction to one too many on a Friday, one picture you wouldn't look at in church? Then is it still fun and harmless? What about the bigger addiction from which all of us suffer, the addiction to sin? You can't delete the sin app from your phone. You can't turn off the sin screen on your computer. That sin addiction is hardwired into the deepest server of your mind, your heart, your very soul. We can't master that sin addiction. Only the LORD can. Only the LORD did. The LORD put Jesus on the cross for your sin addiction. The LORD raised Jesus from the dead to master your sin, to rule over your sin. Finally, sin is not your master. The LORD's love is your master. **THE LORD RULES OVER SIN!** The LORD rules over sin!

Genesis four is one of the very first chapters of the Bible. It reports to us some of the earliest facts of the human existence. God created a perfect world, with no sin, none of any kind. The LORD created two perfect people, Adam and Eve, with no sin, none of any kind. Adam and Eve, had the power, from the LORD to rule over sin. But Adam and Eve soon fell into sin. They fell out of faith and into disobedience. But as quickly as they fell into the ruling power of sin, just as quickly the LORD promised a Savior to rule over sin. That Savior would come and crush the devil's head on the cross. That Savior would rule over sin once and for all. That Savior rose from the dead to rule over sin forever! Adam and Eve lived under that ruling power of the LORD, the power of the LORD to rule over sin.

We will be talking about sin a lot today and seeing the bad example of sin's ruling power, especially over Cain, the very first child of Adam and Eve we hear about. But even as you hear of sin's ruling power, remember the greater power: the LORD rules over sin. Cain's example is certainly a warning not to let sin rule over you. But the LORD's power is greater than sin. The LORD rules over sin. Always remember, the LORD rules over sin.

It sure didn't take long for sin to start ruling. The first sin we see is going through the motions, without faith. Cain brought a sacrifice to the LORD. Cain made an offering. So did Abel. On the surface, the two offerings looked very similar. Except for one thing. Cain brought some, any, didn't really matter to him. Abel brought the best, the firstborn, the fat portions. There was a deeper difference in the two offerings. Abel brought his offering out of faith. Abel brought his offering with this attitude, "I am a sinner. I deserve nothing from God but hell. These fat portions are not mine. They are the LORD's. This is a small sacrifice compared to the LORD's great love for me." Cain came with this attitude, "Eh, I'll throw something together. Doesn't matter which. It's all the same. This should get God off my back."

The LORD saw those deeper attitudes. Notice how the LORD reacted. He looked with favor on Abel, the person, first and then Abel's offering, second. But on Cain, the person, first and then on his offering, second, the LORD did not look with favor. The LORD first noticed the attitude of faith in the heart of Abel and that faith moved Abel to give the fattest, firstborn, best. The LORD first noticed the lack of faith, the going through the motions attitude in Cain and then the LORD did not look with favor on Cain's offering, no matter what it was. The LORD himself comments on these offerings in another part of the Bible, Hebrews chapter 11. There the LORD says, "Abel brought a better offering by faith." The LORD even goes so far as to say, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." As long as sin, not faith, mastered Cain, nothing he could do pleased God.

Do we really need to say what lessons we learn from this? Isn't it obvious? Just going through motions of coming to church is not pleasing to God. Just throwing a few leftover bucks in the offering plate doesn't make God happy. Thinking that your coming to church or giving those offerings will score some points with God or at least keep him off your back is the worst attitude to have. First, see you sin. Then treasure God's love. Then bring those offerings like Abel, the first and best and fattest. It's all the LORD's anyway and the LORD rules over sin, even our sins of going through the motions.

You would have thought that Cain would have learned a lesson from his going through the motions. You would think he would have seen that the LORD was not pleased and God's displeasure would have convicted Cain of his sin and led Cain to change his attitude. If only that were the case. But the LORD did not stop in his efforts to not only convict Cain of Cain's sin, but to point Cain to the LORD's love and forgiveness, but Cain would have none of that either.

Do you really see the patience and love of the LORD? By the way, I keep saying the LORD with all capital letters because that is God's saving name, God's special name of love. The LORD reaches out to Cain. Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? Do what is

right (with the right attitude of faith) and you will be accepted. But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you will need to continue ruling over it. What a vivid picture of sin! This picture applies to all of us. Sin is constantly crouching at the door. Kick him off the doorstep. Don't let him stay close to you. Certainly don't invite sin into your home, your computer, your phone. The struggle against sin will be a constant struggle. Sorry, I wish I could tell you otherwise. You will never stop struggling with sin. You will never stop struggling with sin. We can't stop struggling. We can't master sin on our own. We can't rule over sin by ourselves. Only the LORD can master sin. Only the LORD's help helps us rule over sin.

If you do stop struggling with sin, that's the scariest moment of all. To stop struggling with sin makes you like Cain, who just didn't care about sin, who let sin rule him so completely, he just blew sin off. Cain let sin stay on the porch of jealousy. Cain invited sin in for a hatred party. Cain got wild at the hatred party and murdered his brother. His brother! His brother! Did you notice how many times Abel is called, "his brother!" His brother! And Cain killed him! All because his brother had faith in the LORD and did what was right and Cain couldn't really care less. Sin ruled Cain. Sin mastered Cain. The LORD again reached out in love to Cain. Where is your brother? Here's an opportunity to confess. Of course the LORD knew. Here's a chance to come clean and run to the loving arms of the LORD who promised a Savior to rule over every sin, even the sin of murdering your brother. Cain blows off the chance. "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Could he care any less? Could he be any more nonchalant? Could he be any more apathetic? He killed his brother and he just doesn't care. See what happens when you let sin live on the porch, invite it in for a while?

Now the LORD really lays into Cain. The LORD's love is spurned, his kindness abused. The LORD will have to use another tool. The law! What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me! Literally the LORD said, "The voice of the bloods of your brother keeps on crying out to me!" You thought you would shut your brother up. But every drop of his spilled blood is screaming in my ears. The screaming just won't stop, Cain. You thought no one would see you in the field. But I saw you, every second. Then to show how serious he is about sin, the LORD gave Cain a lifetime to think about it. The ground he tilled would no longer yield crops. That wonderful piece of land he hoped to keep in his family, gone. No more crops. Just a life of restless wandering.

And all this still didn't wake Cain up. He goes on whining like the LORD is unfair! This is more than I can bear. Someone will kill me. I'm going to be a restless wanderer. These are all the classic signs that sin rules over a person. Sin is no big deal. The punishment is unfair, I mean, sin is no big deal. Do you see the great danger when sin rules over you? Any sin, even murder is no big deal, and any punishment, seems too much.

When the LORD rules over the sin in your heart, your attitude will be exactly the opposite, completely 180 degrees different. Sin is a big deal. The only "fair" punishment for me, for my sin would be instant and eternal death. Anything less is just the LORD being nice. Wow! Being rescued from instant and eternal death? That's a big deal. The LORD's rule over sin is so complete that we do not suffer instant and eternal death. Instead, we enjoy full and eternal life. We are not driven from the LORD's presence, we get to enjoy his presence, forever, in eternity. The LORD is not fair. He didn't punish me for my sins. He punished Jesus in my place. The LORD let the innocent die for the guilty. The innocent Jesus takes the place of guilty me. The LORD rules over sin.

Would you believe that the LORD did not stop showing love to Cain, even after this childish, whining, temper tantrum, the LORD still promised seven fold punishment on any one who harmed Cain and on top of this put a mark on Cain to assure him. It's probably better to understand that the LORD gave Cain a sign, actually worked a miracle for Cain to see and be assured of the LORD's promise. Wow! How much love and patience can the LORD show? And how much can Cain spurn, even a special and miraculous sign, just for him?

The LORD has given such signs to us, special, miraculous, personal signs, signs that show the LORD rules over sin, not just for everyone in a general way, but for you personally, in your own heart. We often call these signs Sacraments, special, visible, see-taste-touch ways the LORD assures his promises and rules over sin in our hearts and lives. Baptism is one of those sacraments. Are you baptized? Then you have the LORD's special power to rule over sin. Sin will not be your master, because you are not living under some slavish obedience of going through the motions. You are living under the LORD's love, you are here because you want to be. You are giving your offerings because the LORD has given you everything. You are giving the first and best because the LORD gave you the first and best. Are you baptized? Then you have the LORD's ruling power to kick sin off the porch. Tell the devil to hassle someone else. The devil has to keep his hands off the LORD's baptized. Have you ever, even once, received the Lord's Supper? Then sin, while still a struggle, is not your master. The LORD's rule over sin is your master. You don't blow off sin, you blow it on Jesus and leave it there. The LORD gives you strength to win those struggles with "harmless" habits, with awful addictions. You win! Sin loses! The LORD is on your side. The LORD rules over sin. Amen.