

Adam and Eve's Other Son
Mark 4:1-9
Genesis 4:1-10;25
Rev. Dr. Douglas L. Lobb

It is a great joy for me to be here this weekend, to share in this service and in the activities surrounding your Associate minister, Kathy Rust. As a young minister, I received assistance and encouragement from Neil Swanson and later Norm Ream. It is great to be able to follow their example and share in the life of another new ordinant.

Now, older, heavier and grayer, in my role as Executive Secretary of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, I can officially thank you for the tremendous support you have given to our Association for all 45 years of its existence. I also want to thank you for the gift of leadership that you have given and continue to give. You are clearly, one of the congregations to whom we look as an example and from whom we receive assistance and inspiration. We rejoice in your long and constructive witness to the importance and viability of the free Church movement.

Recently, I ran upon some unusual though graphic descriptions of Church emphasis. For example,

How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but for the message of light to continue, send in your donation today.

How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? None! They use candles.

How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? ...Change?

How many United Church of Christ members does it take to change a light bulb? This statement was issued. "We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey you have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb or light source or non dark resource and present it at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including, incandescent, florescence, three-way, long-life and tinted – all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

How many Congregationalists does it take to change a light bulb? What do you mean? My parents gave that light bulb!

Adam's other son. It is line 14 horizontal in the crossword puzzle and it has 4 blanks. That's easy you say, Cain! But that won't work, then Abel, but this word must end in an "h". Who are you going to ask? Not many people at the local market or the office are likely to know.

It all begins so innocently. You are reading the 4th chapter of Genesis. You read about Adam and Eve, about their first born son Cain and their second born Abel. With an

amazing economy of words we read about Cain being a tiller of the ground, a farmer and Abel being a shepherd. The time comes when they bring their offerings to the Lord. Cain brought some produce of the field while Abel brought lambs of the flock. The Lord accepts Abel's offering but rejects Cain's and Cain is angry.

Some thinkers have made a great deal about this action. Some say it is a typology that hints at the New Testament idea of the Lamb of God. I think it reflects a cultural reality, that at this time in the history of Israel, the predominant mode of living was nomadic sheep herding. This story pre-dates the time of the Children of Israel getting to the Promised Land, and beginning a more agrarian society.

In any case, Cain kills Abel. Four chapters into the Bible and already we've got a murder. Now comes verse 25, Seth is born, Eve is happy and says; now I have a son who replaces Abel because Cain slew him. If we were to follow on, we would find that the genealogy of Israel comes down through Seth – not Cain or Abel. That is a rather significant fact.

To me this highlights a reality that is existent within our culture. We as a people are enamored by good AND evil and furthermore tend to ignore that which is ordinary. Bible readers know Cain – even those who do not read the bible know Cain, if only to utter the phrase, “raising Cain.” People in our society know many who do very good things. We are comfortable with exemplary people and we gloss over many areas when we know of good qualities that have benefited society.

Historically, we know about Albert Schweitzer and his work as a philosopher, theologian interpreter of Bach, but perhaps most of all of his work in Lamborenee as a Doctor working in a humble mission station. Most of us know Mother Teresa or many others who have given so much and we are inspired to live better because of them.

It is also true however, that we know the evil characters of history like Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and tyrants like Idi Amin, Sadaam Hussein and Slobodon Mylosevich.

It is a sad reality to me that a movie filled with violence that is almost beyond our comprehension is almost guaranteed to be an instant hit. And, who can explain the horror that grips us when we read of children 10-13 or 14 killing other children or spraying live ammunition around school grounds. Why are we fascinated by O.J. Simpson, Richard Dahmer or Clinton and Lewinsky? Instead of talking about their lack of ethics or stupidity, we find many trying their best to explain it away or say it really doesn't matter. Hero or Villain, somehow we are fascinated by each. Something draws us toward them – even in Biblical stories. But, who is Seth?

All we now about Seth is that he was born, he married and fathered some children and he died. That is the way it is with most of us on this planet. The influence of any individual is really very limited. It may be significant within that circle, but for the vast majority of people, the circle is very small. The truth is, most of us are like Seth.

My favorite type of reading is Biographies. I get caught up in exploits of the person's life. If only, I was like, whomever it is that I am reading, but I am not. I am like Seth. Oh, I've done some good things, but not noteworthy enough for widespread acclaim – sort of like

Seth. I've had anger, lots of it, but not to the point of murder or even harsh retribution – not very noteworthy or worth remembering.

Think, if you will, of the people who have made a great difference in your life – the doctors who have help alleviate the physical or emotional problems that have occurred; teachers who have faithfully worked known only to their schools, students and their families, some of them have influenced you and made your life richer and more meaningful, but the worlds at large does not know of them nor does it care. But you do.

Think of the researchers who have labored in loneliness and obscurity to find cures for cancer or aids or polio or whatever. One or two have their names associated with the discovery, but thousands who worked on the problem are little known and even less appreciated.

Or preachers. They were the great heroes of yester-year. How many can you name who have greatly influenced your life? How many great preachers can you name who are alive today and who do not have a television program? Though in my opinion, that is no way to measure whether they are great, few, I suspect. Most, who are faithful and hard working, labor in obscurity, influencing the lives of just a few with whom they come in contact. Most are little known – sort of like Seth.

Most of us are like Seth. We are alive and we are important in some areas with some people. We are very significant and very important to a select few but mostly we are obscure and not very well know. Yet God's plan is carried forth by ordinary people. Look carefully at the text and then read on. God's plan with Israel does not come about through the genealogy of Cain, nor of Abel. It comes through Seth.

Seth and his descendants are the carriers of the promise. In the line of Seth comes, Noah and his sons, Ham, Shem and Japath, together with their wives survived the flood and through them the covenant with Israel was carried on, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people."

In the O.T. whenever things got tough, the people started looking for a Messiah, one who would somehow enter into the historical process and bring about an instant solution – usually portrayed as a return to the days of yore when things were better, at least in memory. The disciples bought into this concept fully. They never thought that Jesus would be killed. To the last they waited for a miracle to happen and the kingdom to be restored to its past glory. Jesus was crucified and they were confused, upset and scared. They were boarded up, incommunicado. They were not at the crucifixion, save John, who received the Mother of Jesus. No one was present at the resurrection – no one. Finally the women came – and when they looked, they ran to the boarded up room and said, They have taken him away.

The reaction of the disciples was, that's the last straw, now they have stolen the body. Looking in they remembered, only then did they remember, Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe in the Resurrection? Oh, sure, she said, at the last day, when Elijah returns and the trumpet sounds and the gates are opened. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life, do you believe that? And she said, yes! Yes!

Fifty days after the resurrection, those same disciples were preaching boldly to a huge gathering of people who had assembled at the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover. They were fearless, telling the story boldly. Forget all the arguments and stories. That is the greatest proof of the resurrection, I think. Ordinary people convinced that this Jesus, what he taught, who he was, who he revealed was true. He is alive, they said. Their only liturgy was praise the Lord, Christ has risen – and throughout the ages, ordinary people have responded, he has risen indeed.

History hasn't changed. We are the same type of world today. Millions long for the return of the Messiah or they look for the emergence of some charismatic leader who will lead them away from whatever it is that is troubling. Almost every year we read of some who are led away – sometimes with so much belief and hope that they are willing to die with the leader and do. We never seem to learn.

Oh, how we need good people. How we need strong homes because in strong homes the greatest influence in our lives is from Mothers and Dads, grandmothers and grandfathers. No influence in the world is as powerful as the unspoken witness that comes from children simply seeing that Mom and Dad love each other.

Think how our society would change if all children had the benefit of having parents who insisted upon the importance of reading, who supported the efforts of teachers, who modeled morality and practiced honesty. Ordinary people are through the great hope of the future is carried.

And there is the Church. God knows it is not perfect, but it needs people, ordinary people who will be its constituents and its leaders. Despite its trials, the Church is still the nation's largest volunteer agency and that is how it must remain. The Church must NEVER, even if it has the financial means hire everything done. Salvation comes in the doing. Remember the lepers. They came to Jesus. Heal us they cried. Jesus said, go to the pool of Saloam and bathe yourselves and the scripture says, "as they went they were healed."

Successful Churches are Churches that know, growth comes in doing. Children are changed not so much by what a teacher says, but by the fact that they are there and they care. It is in the struggle to understand the faith and put it into practice that our lives grow. The Church is like family. It is in the living and the laughing; in the crying and the hugging; in the arguments and disagreements and the forgiving that we become real people and a true congregation and that phenomenon is diminished by each one who does not participate. We find the Kingdom of God through the SETHs of this world.

God must have loved Seth – so many were made. And who is Seth?

Seth is the member who is usually here, seldom seen but one who supports his Church and prays for it.

- Seth is the singer who is here for every practice almost all Sundays but never sings a solo.
- Seth is the teacher in the Church school who is seldom seen and known by few others than her students and their parents.

- Seth is the volunteer who sets tables, serves food, washes dishes, answers the telephone and folds letters.
- Seth is the board member who serves faithfully, even when he would like to rest at home
- Seth is the neighbor you don't know very well, but she always smiles and greets you.
- Seth never tells anyone, but she shows up to deliver flowers to shut-ins, drives a car for meals on wheels and sends cards to people.
- Seth has difficulty telling you what he believes, but his is usually present with his family and people like him.
- Seth has never been in a limousine, doesn't own a tux but his grandchildren love him.
- Seth uses her arthritic fingers to sew costumes for the Christmas pageant.
- Seth volunteers to dig or drill, fighting dust and dirt and fatigue to try and rescue a child who fell into an abandoned well.
- Seth hates talking to people about money, but once a year he goes to a few to talk about the Church's needs.
- Seth can't walk anymore, her body is almost worn out but she prays for her friends, her Church, her community and confusing things in the whole world.
- Seth is the non-recognizable one whose ways are modest. Whose wants are few but whose satisfactions are real and genuine.

Seth is the one upon whom families, churches and the whole country relies. It is the SETHS of the world that Jesus gave the Keys of the Kingdom.
 Seth, may your tribe increase, for of such is the Kingdom of God.