**4th Sunday in Advent – Year C – December 23, 2012 - Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Genesis 4:1,2, 6-8, 25-5:5 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**God’s Answer to Pain and Suffering and Death: His Son, Jesus**

*Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” 8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. 25 Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” 26 Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on (worship) the name of the Lord. This is the written account of Adam’s line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man.” 3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. 4 After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 5 Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.*

The past two weeks people have been asking, “Why?” Why did Jacob Roberts walk into an Oregon mall and start shooting? Why did Adam Lanza walk into an elementary school and murder innocent children? Why did a man go crazy with a gun in a rural Pennsylvania town two days ago? Investigators are asking the same questions. They don’t know either.

On Friday the newspaper had an editorial that listed of all of the people that could be blamed. Our lousy national mental health care system - the decay of American families - it’s Hollywood’s fault, they blur the line between fantasy and reality. Finally, he suggested, “Why not blame God as well?” Why did these men carry out these horrible acts of carnage?

I can imagine that our first parents, Adam and Eve, asked the same questions, “Why did you murder your brother, our son? How could you do this?” Premeditated murder… This coldhearted act no doubt shocked Adam and Eve, especially as they contemplated where they had been. They had been in paradise. Everything was good, no sickness, no pain, no tears of sorrow, no depression, no death, and now, possibly just a few decades after their expulsion from the garden, death. With heavy hearts they tossed dirt over their shoulders and lowered the lifeless body of their son into his shallow grave, and they knew this was not God’s fault, it was their own fault. God’s judgment rang in their ears, “Because you ate of this tree, which I commanded you not to, you will return to the ground, since from it you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Our lesson says, **“When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.”** (vs1-2) The image of God is not what he looks like. He is spirit in his essence. He has no shape or form. God’s likeness, his image is perfection, sinlessness, immortality. Adam and Eve had that image. They were without sin. They were immortal. They had an intellect that knew God’s will perfectly. They had the desire to do that will, and their relationship with God and with each other was flawless. That image was destroyed when they disobeyed.

The Holy Spirit proves it to us when he told Moses to write, **“Adam had a son in his likeness, in his own image.”** (vs3) Babies would no longer be born in the image of God, but in the image of Adam. Sure, Seth had the shape of his father’s face, he had fingers, toes, eyes, nose, speech like his father, and qualities in manners and character. But in these Seth did not reflect the image of God, but the image of his father, Adam. The image and likeness of sin, original sin, inherited sin, a corrupted, evil, wicked image and likeness.

This sin is the reason why a man murdered his brother in cold-blood. Sin is the reason why people shoot innocent children, why people ignore their conscience, why people are quick to blame others rather than take responsibility for their own actions, because sin does not allow human beings to follow God’s will. Sin motivates human beings to pursue their own selfish desires, however perverted and wicked they may be.

Sin is why there is pain and suffering in this world. It is not necessarily a particular sin that causes all pain. Human beings cause untold pain and suffering. Look at the governments of Sudan and Syria who are bombing their own citizens at this very moment. But we dare not under any circumstances say that pain is God’s will. It is not his will that you suffer. His plan, his will is to bring good out of evil for those who trust him.

But we still ask why, “Why does God allow pain and suffering?” Because pain and suffering is a consequence of our sin. “But if he is the Almighty God, who has the power to stop pain and suffering, why?” When we suffer and when we see others suffer we reject God. We cast him aside. But have we done anything about the pain and suffering? Have we taken away our pain and suffering? When we put God out of the picture, then we put ourselves into a position where we are left to deal with pain without God. Is that really where we want to be? To live a life of meaningless pain, without God?

And then there’s death. Why do people die? The world’s answer: It’s natural. Natural? Furthest thing from the truth! When you see Jesus, the creator of the world, who gives life and breath to everything on this earth, and he stands weeping at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus who has died - that’s not natural! Death was an unwelcome intruder into a perfect world who was not at all prepared for this enemy. Our lesson tells us why death came into the world. “**Then he lived a total of 930 years, and then he died**.” (vs5) When you continue reading chapter 5, you marvel at the longevity of each of these patriarchs. Then after each name is written these words and they slap you in the face, **“…and then he died… and then he died… and then he died**.” Death came because of sin. Death is the consequence of sin, our sin, our fault. And all sinned, therefore, all will die. (Romans 3:23; 5:12)

We know this, and yet we try to run away from it. We try not to think about it. We do not readily acknowledge the fact that while we live we are dying. We are shocked when someone does die. Why does this shock us? All sinned, all will die.

When someone dies we mourn and grieve - the price we pay for having loved someone so dearly. It doesn’t seem fair! When we are hurting our response is to deny God. We ask, “Why did they have to die?” “Because they were a sinful human being” is not the response we want to hear, but it is the truth. So we abandon God, give up on him, because we think death is something God did. But have we done anything about death, solved its problem, done anything to halt its advance on our own body? No! We’ve again put ourselves into a position where we are left to deal with death without God. Is there where we want to be, to face death without the one who gave us life, who has all power over death and grave?

Maybe you’ve come to accept the fact that pain and suffering is a result of sin. Maybe you’ve come to accept that death is a consequence of sin and is our fault. But we still want to know why, “Why, God, why? What is the purpose of all of this? If God is so merciful, if he is a loving God, then why?” God has an answer…

God’s answer to pain is God himself racked with pain. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Surely he carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4) Yes, the pain of the world made its way into the soul of Christ, all of our pain and suffering and sin. This is the one time in history that God did nothing about pain, when evil men swung at him, spit on him, when they lifted him up above the ground so that he would experience the most excruciating pain devised by human kind. The Father did nothing about it. In fact, he added to the pain. The Father accused his Son of all of our sin. The times we denied God, the times we were angry at God and accused him of things he was not responsible for, we deserved to be punished, we deserved to suffer hell, but God the Father allowed his Son to go through hell on the cross, so we would not. He abandon his own Son for us, so that we would never be abandoned by him.

“If God is so merciful and loving….” How about, “Since God is so merciful and loving…” What kind of God would himself suffer so much if he was not merciful and loving? Yes, he is your God, the One True God who loves you and proved it, with his sufferings… and death.

God’s answer to death is God himself dying and being buried in the earth. Although he had no sin of himself, he allowed the consequence of your sin and mine to come upon him. Sinners must die. Jesus became our sin. He had to die. The only way that Jesus could undo the mess we made with sin and death is by dying himself, then rising again. God’s answer to death is God walking out of his own grave, living, breathing human being, as he tossed aside death’s chains.

By his resurrection Jesus proved that death has no power. Yes, it is waiting wide-eyed for each of us. But it will not and cannot keep us in our graves forever. When Jesus comes again and says to you, “Young man, young woman, I say to you, get up!” death will have no choice but release you from your grave, and you will walk out of the ground a – living, breathing human being. You have an answer to death: it is Jesus Christ, the one who died but now lives!

It is through the power of his death and resurrection that Jesus has already restored the image of God in you. Through holy baptism, Jesus’ death and resurrection have washed away your sins. He has given you victory over your grave. You have been made new again. Through faith in Jesus, you have been created in the image and likeness of God. While we live here below, we still must live with the image of God within us and the image of Adam. But it is this image that moves you to trust God. It is this renewed image that believes God is a loving God – your renewed image always looks at the cross and empty tomb as proof of God’s love for you. Your renewed image seeks him for comfort and strength. This image allows you to find purpose and meaning in suffering and death.

The renewed image looks to Jesus as the one who always loves you and always understands you. Jesus succumbed to everything we endure on this earth. He lived through grief and pain and suffering. He endured death. So he knows when you hurt, when you question, when you suffer. He knows. He was there. He is waiting for you to talk to him about it. And he has an answer.

In this renewed image of God restored in you through baptism, you find that answers to the question, “Why all of this pain and suffering?” You know that he is not punishing you. He made his Son feel punishment for us. But in his Word your Father reassures you that he uses pain and suffering to draw you closer to him. He uses pain and suffering to point you back to him. When we are weak, when we suffer, we are forced to run back to his arms, where he tenderly holds us tight, as a Father holds his child, and he says, “I know, I know… but this is what I’ve promised you!” And he turns us around and holds out his Word to us and says…

Romans 8:28, **“We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** Romans 8:18, **“We know that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** Romans 8:38, **“We are convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus.”** Our Father tells us that one day this pain and suffering will end, when we reach Paradise, with Adam and Eve, with Abel and Seth and all the believers. We know that pain will work for our benefit. How? We don’t always know. God never said, “Figure it out,” he said, “Trust me.” That changes our view on pain and death, doesn’t it?

The shootings this past year may change our view on gun control, on conceal carry permits, it may change our view on help for those who are mentally ill. But I pray that it changes our view on the time we spend with our children and loved ones. I pray that it moves us to focus more on the time we spend in the word of God together, to teach and study the story of Cain and Abel, and see what sin does. But more important, to learn and to know about Jesus, and how he is the answer to our questions. He changes our view on pain and death, he who said, “**I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die**.” (John 11:25,26) Jesus is all we have as we face pain and death, and he is all we need. Amen.