

October 19 & 20, 2024

Lost in Translation | *Watch the Door*

Genesis 4:3-16

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Let's say it's a rainy afternoon and you are at home with two kids and to take advantage of the rainy day you get out the crayons, markers, paper and you ask your kids to do an art project. They both sit down at the kitchen table and they both work hard and after a while they finish. They proudly bring their art to you, and you take a look at both of them. What do you say in the moment? You are most assuredly going to marvel at both equally. You saw them both working at it. They took their time and dumped a great deal of effort into their art. The truth is that one is going to be better, aesthetically to the eye, than the other. It's just the way it is. One will be a "better" artist than the other, but you are still going to put them both on the fridge, proudly displayed for all to see.

Now imagine you are an art teacher with kids in your class and two of the students without prompting, turn in a voluntary special art project. Let's imagine that both of these students were inspired by the TV show "My Little Pony" and decided to turn in a hand drawn picture of a unicorn surrounded by rainbows. They could have decided to draw anything but that's what they chose. "My Little Pony" is very inspirational. This wasn't an assignment, they just wanted to show their appreciation to the art teacher. One student – who has some skill, hastily draws out what might be some kind of animal with a horn and some arches that might be a rainbow, but it is colorless and turns it in. Is it a piece of art – well sure, but it's sloppy and not really worthy of their efforts. The other student takes their time. Draws a beautiful unicorn with a wonderfully colored rainbow and turns it in. What is the art teacher going to say? The art teacher is going to turn to the piece of art that is worthy of that student's skill. The art teacher is going to lift up that piece of art as the example.

Now imagine the sloppy student gets frustrated mad even and the art teacher sees this and being

the art teacher, they tell the sloppy student to work harder next time and cautions them against letting anger get the best of them. But the sloppy student cannot control their anger and kills the other student whose piece of art was lifted up.

This is the story of Cain and Able, minus the "My Little Pony" art project.

³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ 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." ⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. (Gen 4:3-8 NRS)

Both of these brothers bring an offering to God, without any prompting. They weren't told to, they weren't asked to. In the story Cain becomes the first person in scripture to bring an offering. However, his offering was, eh... nothing to brag about. Cain just grabs some harvested grain, nothing special about it. Kind of sloppy. However Able brings the first of his flock – and the fat portions. Able brings the best. And God, always the teacher lifts up Able's offering as the example of giving. Cain's countenance falls. Cain gets frustrated and angry and God, the teacher warns Cain. God says, Cain – sin is crouching at the door. Cain, the temptation to act like a beast, is crouching at the door and it desires to take over, and if it you let it, if you cannot master it, you will do something awful. You will act like a beast. Cain doesn't master it and becomes a beast and kills his little brother.

And there is the whole deal. What makes humans different than beasts? The Apostle Paul answered that question this way.

²² *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23 NRS)*

In part the whole creation story is a story of humanity separating itself from the wild animals. To live out the fruits of the spirit. No matter how we try to anthropomorphize the animal kingdom, overlaying human characteristics on animals, they were created to be animals, and we were created to be humans. In part that is what the snake was trying to get Eve to do. The snake says, “Eh... be a beast like me.” Self-control, who needs it, we wild animals don’t, you don’t either”. The amazing thing is that once the fruit is eaten Adam and Eve realize they are not animals because the first thing they do is make clothes. Animals don’t need clothes. And as they leave the garden – now with the knowledge of good and evil, God gives them real clothes to further remind them.

Cain, the beast is crouching at the door. It desires you, don’t give in. Control it. God says, you are not a beast, you can master it.

So how is that possible... at times it seems impossible. From little moments like someone not appreciating our “My Little Pony” drawing to having a bad review at work or being cut off on your daily commute. How do we learn from the story of Cain. The Apostle Paul lays it out for us.

I believe that the last fruit of the spirit of self-control is last for a reason. It is in living love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and faithfulness – all things that animals do not do, cannot do, it is in living all of those, in practicing all of those, we are more likely to also have more self-control. It’s almost impossible to get angry when you are practicing love. It’s almost impossible to react to situations with violence, whether verbal or physical when you are practicing gentleness. You are able to master jealousy when you are practicing joy. You are able to master hate when you are practicing generosity. You are able to master the beast that is crouching at the door when you are practicing patience, kindness.

So, this week pick one fruit of the spirit. Anyone of them. Each day wake up and make a decision to practice a fruit of the spirit and when your countenance falls... when your “art project” isn’t good enough, your faithfulness will master the beast.