

8.17.2025 Trinity 9 (Luke 15:11-32)

*Am I my brother's keeper?* It's a question nearly as old as humanity, and a question that applies to us all. *Am I my brother's keeper?* In other words, am I personally responsible for the welfare of others? Whether I like a person or not, am I called to love them? This is the question I'd ask you to consider this morning, and to begin, let's look at the passage in which the question is found. The book of Genesis introduces us to Cain and Abel, the first brothers, the sons of Adam and Eve. In Genesis these brothers are described in this way: *"Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.'"* Cain spoke to (had words with) Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, *"Where is Abel your brother?"* He said, *"I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"* (Genesis 4:2-9).

The book of Genesis introduces us for the first time to the relationship of brotherhood, and sadly, it's not brotherly love, kindness, and affection we find there, but envy, hatred, and even murder, and there are other biblical examples that portray brotherhood in a similar way. Consider Jacob and Esau, brothers who were separated from one another for twenty years because of Jacob's deceit and manipulation, and Esau's hatred and disregard for the blessings he'd so generously been given as the firstborn. Consider the next generation, Jacob's sons, whose jealousy and resentment became so intense that they plotted to kill their younger brother Joseph, but instead, at the last minute sold him into slavery, and with the expectation that they'd never see their despised brother again, they returned home and made it appear to their now heartbroken father that Joseph had been torn apart and killed by wild beasts.

The book of Proverbs tells us that *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother*

*is born for adversity*” (Proverbs 17:17). However, the examples we’ve considered so far reveal the truth that brothers often fail to live up to that high call. A brother is *born for adversity*, a brother is born to love selflessly, sacrificially, and unconditionally in the most adverse conditions, in the most difficult times, and yet, a brother’s failure, our failure to do that which we were born to do, began with the first older brother, Cain, continued with Esau, and again with Joseph’s older brothers, and is found even in the example of the older brother in the parable we read this morning.

*A brother is born for adversity*, but in the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the younger brother was in the midst of adversity, living in the most difficult times, when he was lost in a foreign land, when he’d wasted all of his money on prostitutes and reckless living, when he longed to be fed with the food the pigs were eating, where was his older brother? Where was the one who was born for adversity, one who was called to love him, even when he’d run out of reasons to like him? Some might say that the older brother was right where he should’ve been, he was serving his father, and in fact, this is exactly what the older brother said when his father came out and pleaded with him to come in and welcome his brother home.

When the father begged the older brother to come in, *“He answered and said to his father. Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time”* (Luke 15:29), and while his reply may sound like the obedience of a son, it is in fact the obedience of a slave. When you study this passage you learn that the greek word used in the phrase *“I have been serving you,”* is one used not for the work of a son, but for the work of a slave. In this parable, Jesus describes a beloved son who took on the role of a servant because he found no joy in the work he completed with his father. His service wasn’t, as we pray daily, “perfect freedom,” it was slavery, and his comment, *“I never transgressed your commandment at any time,”* further reveals the condition of his heart, for who can say those words to their father, *I never transgressed your commandment at any time*. No one, for we all have erred and strayed like lost sheep. We all *“have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans

3:23).

*A brother is born for adversity*, yet like Cain, Esau, Jacob, Joseph's brothers, and the rest of us, the prodigal's older brother didn't live up to that high call - he wasn't there to love his brother in the most difficult times. His younger brother left home, and there's no evidence that the older did anything to stop him. His younger brother wasted his money on prostitutes and reckless living in a foreign land, and again, the older made no effort to rescue him, to go and say to him, "Brother! Enough! Let's go home." And when the prodigal finally came to his senses, when he repented and returned, when the dead son was alive, when the lost was found, the older brother wouldn't welcome him home. Unlike his father, who ran to welcome him, unlike God, who runs to welcome His wayward children home, the older brother was *angry and would not go in*.

*A brother is born for adversity*. We were all born for adversity. As children of God, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, we received this high call described in the Gospel of our Lord. Jesus said it this way, "*I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me*" (Matthew 25:35-36). This is the life of love to which we are called, and yet, like so many of these examples we fall short, but thanks be to God, there is one Brother who lived up to this call - our Savior Christ.

Now, Holy Scripture clearly presents Jesus Christ as being fully God, one with the Father (John 1:1, 10:30), the Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity who left His throne in heaven to be made flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14). For such reasons we call Him our Lord and God (John 20:28). However, there are other passages that refer to Jesus as our Brother. Hebrews 2:11 states, "*For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for this reason He (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*" In Romans (8:29) we learn that "*Those whom God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that*

*He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters,”* and in the Gospel Jesus declares that those who follow Him are His brothers and sisters, St. Mark tells us that Jesus *“looked at those seated in a circle around Him and said... Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother”* (Mark 3:34-35).

Christ our Savior is Christ our Brother, and while it’s disheartening to reflect on examples of how often we fail to live up to the high call of being like our Father, we find great peace and rest in the blessed assurance that Jesus is our Brother. The Brother who will not fail or forsake us, the Brother who *loves at all times*, the Brother who was *born for adversity*, the Brother who perfectly lives up to this call, because unlike Cain who defiantly said to God, *“I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper,”* unlike Cain, who murdered his brother, Jesus is our Keeper. In anger Cain killed his brother, but in love Christ our Brother gave His life for us. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, but Christ our Brother set us free from slavery to sin and death. The prodigal’s older brother never left his father’s house to go search for his brother, but Christ our Savior is Christ our Brother who left the Father’s house *“to seek and to save the lost”* (Luke 19:10). He is the Son of God, and He is the Brother, who came to rescue us, and lead us home.