

**LENT MIDWEEK #2**  
**Am I My Brother's Keeper?**

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You have probably heard the story of Cain and Abel many times in your life. It is a tragic story – a story of senseless murder, and yet it is driven by all-too-familiar jealousy and anger.

It is often thought that Cain used a stone to kill Abel. The Bible doesn't say so explicitly, but that is very possible. Out in the field, there would have been plenty of rocks at his disposal. Can you picture it? Cain, with a burning anger in his heart, reaching down hefted a cool, smooth stone. What contempt – what rage must he have felt as he struck down his brother?

Cain, you remember was a farmer. And if you know anything about growing food, one of the things you have to do consistently is clear all the rocks out before you can work the soil. I wonder, after the murder, what must it have been like? Each time he bent down to clean away the rocks from the field, do you think he was reminded of his crime? Everyday he went out to coax life out of the ground, the stones shouted at him, "**What have you done?**"

The same words that God himself spoke to Cain, "**What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!**"

Those accusing, convicting words cut deep. God had warned him to be on guard against sin. His words are striking: "**Sin is lurking at your door, its desire is for you.**" It is the picture of a wild animal, a lion perhaps, pacing just outside Cain's heart. It is quite the opposite of what we think. Sin does not satisfy our cravings, but rather it craves us.

But God's warning did not take root in Cain's heart, because Cain had hardened it. He would not heed God's word, and it cost Abel his life. In a way, the stone that Cain killed Abel with was his own heart.

What about you? Is there some sin in your life that haunts you? Is there some hard-heartedness in your past or present that shouts at you, "What have you done?"

In reality, we all have sin and guilt and regret that we live with. Maybe you've never murdered anyone, but we all have had the hard heart of Cain from time to time.

But there is hope. God has another word for you today: **“A new heart I will give you... I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”** A new heart. A soft heart. A fresh start.

And things are different. The hard heart takes, like Cain who took his brother's life. Like Cain trying to seize God's favor on his own terms. Like us trying to grab wealth or status or self-worth. The hard heart takes.

But the soft heart asks and receives. And when we ask of God the Father, what we receive is always good. Not always easy or comfortable, but always good. Like Jesus said, **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”**

And the greatest of these good gifts is none other than Christ himself, by whose death our hard hearts are softened and by whose life our lives are given meaning and direction. Christ, who gave his life so that we may receive and live.

*Loving Father, give me a soft heart. Remove from me the guilt of my sin and the heaviness of my heart of stone. Restore unto me the hope and peace and joy that come only as a gift from you. For the sake of Your Son and in His Name we pray. AMEN.*