

Sermon Suggestion 2 - By Dr. Marnix Visscher

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Scripture Reading

Genesis 4:1-17 (Special focus on verses 11-12)

Intro

From the beginning of the Bible, the refugee issue is apparent. Immediately, after the Fall Adam and Eve are banned from the Garden of Eden. Afterwards, we read in Genesis 4 about Cain who had to flee because of the murder of Abel. He is cursed and became a 'wanderer and refugee on earth.'

Below you will find a brief discussion of key points from Genesis 4:11-17. Throughout Scripture you get a glimpse of the meaning of Jesus' salvation work for both our situation and the situation of refugees in our world. From there we work out some thoughts about the calling we have for the refugees in our midst.

Text

Genesis 4:11: 'Cursed are you...'

Here the word cursed is used just as it is in Genesis 3:17, however there is a difference. Genesis 3:17 is about the ground that is cursed, whereas Genesis 4:11 a person (Cain) is cursed.

Genesis 4:12: 'The soil will no longer yield its crops'

The elaboration of the curse is in line with Genesis 3:17: 'the earth gives less' or 'yields no more.' The curse that Cain received was in line with the curse that had come over all creation. Whether we have or have not committed murder, for God there is no principal difference. 'For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

Genesis 4:12: 'You shall be a wanderer and a refugee on the earth.'

For Cain the curse also means that he has no resting place on earth. The Hebrew word for wanderer (nā ') is often used for drifting about and escaping from death. It is also used to flee before God's judgement and flying from God's face. Cain also says that he will be hidden from God's presence (verse 14). The word for refugee (nād) indicates pointlessness as a result of threat, or from inner turmoil.

Genesis 4:15: 'The sign'

We do not know what that sign was. What matters is that God guarantees Himself for Cain. He has put the sign and thus assumes responsibility for Cain's protection.

Genesis 4:17: 'The city'

We should not think of a big place with many residents, considering the small number of people who lived on earth at that time. We can think of the characteristics of a city in ancient times and the late Middle Ages: It is a fortified place where it is safe to live.

Lines through Scripture

The people of Israel lived as strangers in Egypt. Here too we see the effect of the curse that lays upon creation since the fall. On the one hand, it was God's plan that his people would stay in Egypt for a long time. On the other hand, Jacob favoured his dear son Joseph, the envy of his brothers ultimately brought him to slave in Egypt. But eventually it was the famine that brought the brothers of Joseph and even Jacob himself to Egypt. Famine and all kinds of other natural disasters show us the curse that lays upon mankind.

But God also uses these things to carry out His wonderful plan of salvation. After the exodus, God gave the people His statutes and commandments. It is also remembered that the people of Israel were strangers themselves in Egypt. For Israel that should be a good reason to well treat the stranger in their midst, as if he was a native-born Israelite. (Leviticus 19: 9-10, 33-34)

Jesus was also a "wanderer and refugee on earth". In his very young life as a human being He was already on the run to Egypt. Later He said of himself: "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head." Matthew 8:20) Jesus also had to deal with much enmity, precisely as Cain already feared for himself.

It is therefore important to see that God protects Cain from possible enmity. Jesus on the other hand has completely been undermined by hostility. Paul writes about it in Galatians 3: 13: 'But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

In the Greek text of Galatians, the same words are used in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of Genesis 3:17 and 4:11 (cataras and epicataras).

Lines to Today

Today's refugee problem has everything to do with the curse that through the fall has come about creation. Many people are on the run from famine, natural disasters, war and prosecution. Some are, like Cain, on the flight due to great personal sin. But if Cain as a killer receives protection from God and God apparently still provides a permanent residence for him, our care for refugees should certainly be the same.

We must also bear in mind that we all have to deal with the consequences of the fall. Diseases, accidents, crisis in agriculture, environmental issues, street violence and economic crisis are all expressions of the curse that came about creation. Above all we all are naturally refugees: on the run for god. But as lost children coming home in Christ, God asks us to consider the stranger as

one of us, because we ourselves have also been refugees. (Leviticus 19)

Sermon Outline

Introduction

Connect with the situation of refugees and, by doing so, introduce the situation of Cain and, finally, the situation of the listeners present in the service.

To a refugee you can ask if he already has received a legal status. 'Status' means that the person can remain legally in your country. Having no legal status means the person has to go back and that the person may be on the run again.

Refugees always have been there. It started with the fall when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden. Then we read in Genesis 4 about Cain who had to flee because of the murder of Abel. He is cursed and a "wanderer and refugee on earth". Still, God gave Cain protection. Cain even settled somewhere and built another city. Cain was allowed to build a new future.

In this history, we can recognize something of our own "status". We have our cities and safeties, but maybe we are also in flight or on the run. We all recognize forms of flight behaviour in daily life.

Give examples of flight behaviour here. For example, in personal life you have to resolve a conflict, but you may keep postponing it. In social life we talk about everything, for example climate change, but we do not change our lifestyle.

What about our relationship with God? Cain could eventually settle somewhere else, but it is the question whether he came closer to God or not. It is often like it is in the parable of the royal wedding (Matthew 22: 1-14): God may play a role in our lives, but we only make time for Him if it suits us and maybe we even never make time. We think God asks us questions that are too difficult.

Example of such a difficult question: where is your brother Abel? But also: where is that church member you have not seen in church / meeting for a while? And also: what do you do for the refugee who has been sitting lonely in his room at the refugee center for a while?

Challenge

It is now to see that we are basically no different from the refugee. Even Jesus counted himself one of them!

We might be living our white picket fence dream, but we may be in flight for God. We prefer to take care of ourselves and fix our own problems, because trusting God is not something naturally. The challenge is: Move yourself into the position of the refugee. Someone who might also have had everything (education, family, work, social status), but had to leave everything to save his life. What is actually really valuable in life?

Here you can name things that we often find valuable in our lives: On what do we spend a lot of time? Ask the question: what is your life worth if all of this goes away? Does your life still have meaning? What meaning could the life of the refugee have?

Remember Jesus and his followers. They knew the status of being refugees. Jesus was on the run as a small child to Egypt (Matt. 2). At later age, he had no place on earth to lay down his head (Matthew 8:20). After Pentecost, the Church was scattered through prosecution.

Jesus is standing next to the refugee. He came as a refugee to our world. He shared in the curse of sin that came over creation through our guilt. In an unfair procedure he was rejected and killed. But He overcame death and now He invites us to come with Him with our 'asylum application'. He has the God Status for us. He is that one asylum seeker who gets status for many! Family reunion is called: who comes to Jesus becomes a child of God.

Mission

There is one more point: Leviticus 19: 33 and 34: "Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. ³⁴ Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God." (New Living Translation)

Anyone who has obtained asylum with Jesus must give other strangers the same. Not only in the spiritual sense (passing on the gospel), also in social terms. We should give refugees who came to our country a place in our society. Only when those Biblical criteria have been met, we can be proud of our countries.

Here you can address negative feelings some people have about refugees.

Some examples from the writer

- *'I was once with a group of volunteers on a market in a village near a refugee seekers center to see if we could do something for the refugees. When we asked somebody if some of the refugees would come and visit the market sometimes we received the answer: "no, fortunately not."*

- *With a table of my organization called Gave, I was on a Christian fair and had a conversation with one of the attendants. The person I was speaking with had the opinion that refugees have nothing to look for in my country, the Netherlands. They just had to go back to their own country.*

I told him that I think that apart from any political conception, the refugees are here anyways and as Christians we have the opportunity to reach them with God's liberating gospel, which often is not possible in their country of origin. When I asked the person if he thought that was important he answered: "Mission organizations (And also Open Doors)

do a very good job; They will bring the gospel in their own country. "

But God points us another way in Leviticus 19! When we realize that we ourselves also have an asylum status with God, we also give it to others.

Grand refugees to have a place in the church of Jesus Christ. Among the refugees, we meet are Christians who are desperate to be connected with Christian brothers and sisters. Among the refugees are also others, Muslims in particular, who are worth our time and attention. If we feel lonely and deserted, we greatly appreciate a visit from somebody from the community. That's the same for refugees. They are often very alone and feel lonely in a strange country. Nobody looks after them. God asks us to see them as one of our own people. If there is a refugee center near you, go there! The people living there may experience that there is a God who also looks after them and in Him they can truly come home.