

A Sermon Preached by Gregory Hall at Clarence Presbyterian on August 14, 2022

THE LAND OF NOD

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Genesis 4:16

In the spring of 1976 I spent a semester in Austria. The journey to Vienna made me question why I signed up for the program. I left home early one February day and drove six hours to Montreal where my sister left me at the airport. The other 18 students in the program all gathered in Trudeau Airport for our departure. I arrived at the terminal late in the afternoon in plenty of time for the flight, which was to depart at 7:00 PM. The flight was delayed and we did not get off the ground until well after 10:00 PM. The flight was so late in arriving in Amsterdam that we missed our connecting flight. We had to wait several hours for arrangements to be made on a Romanian airline. Romania was still a communist country and the flight attendants acted as friendly as border guards. We finally landed in Vienna more than 36 hours after I had left home.

We were met at the Airport by the director of the program who piled all 19 students on a bus and dropped members of the group off at the various places where we were going to live during the semester. The females were all assigned to various homes around the city, while the guys were to live in a dorm like setting. I was assigned to a room with an Austrian roommate who spoke no English at all and at that point I did not understand even a word of German. He was not happy to see me.

Needless to say, after little sleep for two days and finding myself in a room with someone with whom I could not communicate, I began to feel sorry for myself. I wondered what was I doing here? I felt I just did not belong. I was a stranger in a strange land.

I believe this experience of alienation is part of the human predicament. Human sin means we live in isolation from God and each other. This is the truth that we learn in the fourth chapter of Genesis. The fourth chapter of Genesis tells a painful story. This chapter is not in the common Sunday lectionary. Which means if a congregation follows the lectionary you would never hear the story of Cain and Abel. In the tragic story of Cain and Abel, we are reminded that part of the reality of life is having the sense that we do not quite belong.

In this chapter we meet the first brothers Cain and Abel. Cain becomes jealous of his brother because Abel's sacrifice appears to be more acceptable to God. In a fit of jealousy and rage, Cain kills his brother and buries him in an attempt to hide his sin. God confronts Cain just as he confronted Adam and Eve in the garden. God does not punish Cain by taking his life. Instead he tells Cain that he will be banished from God's presence. Our text tells us **then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.** Cain must live in the land of Nod.

This morning I would like us to focus on the phrase “Land of Nod.” I believe that part of what it means to be human is to live in the land of Nod. The word Nod has several connotations.

One meaning is restlessness. Living in the land of Nod can mean experiencing the truth that nothing on this earth can overcome the bored, restless feelings in our souls.

One of the great speechwriters in the Reagan White house was Peggy Noonan. Following her White House years, she wrote a book called ***What I Saw At The Revolution*** in which she described her experiences in working for the President. The fact that surprised me was that before Noonan went to work at the White House, she worked at CBS for Dan Rather. Remember CBS was not known as a center of Reagan supporters. In writing about her work with Dan Rather she painted this portrait:

Rather. How to explain Rather? I knew him at a hard time, the early days when he first got the Cronkite job – for a year after he was anchor they still called it the Cronkite Show in house – and the ratings were down. The ratings went up and he expanded – a sweetness came out, and a sensitivity, though there was still about him, I thought, a frustration, a bristling. I would think, this is the sadness of a man who got what he wanted. Now he’s stuck with it.

Living in the Land of Nod can mean being restless because nothing in this world can satisfy us. We all know people who move from job to job, relationship to relationship, experience to experience seeking that joy that always is just beyond their reach. This is the restlessness of living in the land of Nod.

The word Nod can also mean wandering. It denotes wandering from God. Human beings were created to be in communion with God. The picture painted in the Garden is one of human beings living in the presence of God. One of the results of sin is a rupture in the relationship between God and men and women. Cain kills his brother and **Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.** The great punishment for Cain was to live away from God’s presence.

You and I live in the same land of Nod. We do not always sense God’s presence in our lives. The sin we commit makes it difficult for us to feel God’s love at work in our lives. There are times when we have inklings of God’s presence. There are times in worship or prayer or in receiving love from others we become bathed in God’s grace. But so much of the time God seems so far away. He is far away for we have wandered from him.

Living in the land of Nod can also mean we experience a sense that we just do not belong, that we have a thirst for something that cannot be found in this world.

Cain is driven out and forced to live as an alien in a strange land. We too can at times realize we are strangers. One of the most famous journalists of the last century

was Malcolm Muggeridge. He spent most of his life as a seeker until coming to faith late in his life. The sense of being a stranger was a central experience of his life. He explained it in these words:

This sense of being a stranger, which first came to me at the very beginning of life, I have never quite lost, however engulfed I might be, at particular times and in particular circumstances, in earthly pursuits – whether through cupidity, vanity or sensuality, three chains that bind us, three goads that drive us, three iron gates that isolate us in the tiny dungeon of our ego. For me there has always been – and I count it the greatest of all blessings – a window never finally blacked out, a light never finally extinguished. Days or weeks or months might pass. Would it never return – the lostness? I strain my ears to hear it, like distant music, my eyes to see it, a very bright light very far away. Has it gone forever? And then – ah! The relief. Like slipping away from a sleeping embrace, silently shutting a door behind one, tiptoeing off in the gray light of dawn – stranger again. The only ultimate disaster that can befall us I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be at home here on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland, which is that other kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

Muggeridge not only describes the fact that we do not always feel we belong in this world, he counts it a blessing. He believes this sense of alienation is good for it reminds us that this fallen world is not ultimate. There is another reality that is our eternal destiny. There is another place where we truly belong.

In our Gospel Lesson for this morning, Jesus promises us that we are not doomed to wander in the Land of Nod for eternity. We are not condemned to lives of restless alienation. Jesus tells us that he has gone on ahead to prepare a place for us in his Father's kingdom. He tells us he has made all things ready, **so that where I am you may be also.**

We have an eternal home. That home is with Jesus. It means the restoration of relationships frayed by sin. Cain was forced out of the presence of God. Jesus makes it possible for us to know God. Jesus describes heaven as going home to the Father's house to live with him for eternity. God is perfect joy and love. In heaven we will know a perfect and full relationship with God. We shall be at home.

I am sure many of you have taken a long vacation and known the relief of coming home. The last month was full of travel. Kathleen and I spent almost two weeks with a group touring Switzerland and France. We visited beautiful sites in Lucerne, Geneva, Lyon, Dijon and Paris. We loved Mt. Pilatus, Chartres, a concert at St. Chapelle and many other highlights. We were home for two weeks and then we were off across the Atlantic again with thirteen youth for Scotland. We had a wonderful experience on Iona. It was a time of refreshment and renewal.

And yet after flying long hours and riding on buses and ferries so many miles, after sleeping in strange beds, after eating meals in many different places, after

experiencing many new sights and sounds it was a relief to return home to Clarence. We looked forward to our own bed. It is always great to return to that place where we belong.

In his death and resurrection Jesus has prepared a place for us. He has prepared a home for us in his eternal kingdom. We have a place where we ultimately belong.

This world will always be a mixed bag for us. Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow, victory and failure, highs and lows, hopes and disappointments. While the story of Cain tells us that we can find it difficult living in the Land of Nod, Jesus tells us not to be anxious or afraid. Jesus promises us that no matter how difficult life may seem, we know our ultimate destiny. We know that this world is not our true home. We have a home not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

In this life there will be times when we just do not fit in. There are places, which feel alien to us. We can wonder just how we fit in. We can question what purpose there is for our lives. We can hold on to the promise that there is a home prepared for us. God has not condemned us to live forever in the Land of Nod; he has prepared a place for us in his eternal kingdom.

In a few moments Allison will sing a song by Van Morrison. This song reminds us that we will not always live in the Land of Nod. We have a home. Listen to these words:

In the gentle evening breeze
By the whispering shady trees
I will find my sanctuary in the Lord
And no matter where I roam
I will find my way back home
I will always return to the Lord

Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house; if it were not so, I should have told you; for I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.