

A Sermon on Exploring a Good Work Ethic
Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for April 26th, 2020 (and beyond)

For this sermon, the first story that comes to my mind is Cain and Abel in Chapter 4 of the Book of Genesis. Both Cain and Abel had arguably good work ethics. But, Abel was rewarded more greatly for preparing a fine meal of cooked lamb (a burnt offering) than Cain was for his raw vegetarian offering. It's similar or could be likened today to you (in place of the Lord thy God) paying less for a basket of vegetables at the grocery store that you may later prepare yourself and paying more for a meal prepared by a chef at a restaurant that butchers its own livestock for service. In this instance, Cain would represent the produce section at the grocery store or farmer's market and Abel the restaurateur. Cain and Abel are brothers. Cain can't handle that his offering is not accepted or rewarded as equal to that of his brother Abel and kills Abel. For some reason that has translated to some to mean that those who are farmers of vegetables or grains are like Cain and less deserving than those in other areas of business and agriculture. We see this play out with the "county farm" or agricultural developments run by the corrections system where those adjudicated are coerced or forced to work in agriculture. And, that reinforces the arguable demonization and/or demonetization of those who work in agriculture. It isn't fair because I lack a green thumb and though I've tried repeatedly can't seem to grow my own vegetables successfully. I appreciate all those who work in agriculture regardless of whether produce or animal products. I can care for animals and do well with that so in my mind growing vegetables is more difficult than caring for animals. However, I heartily disagree with Cain's killing Abel. After hearing about Abel's culinary skills, I'm sad we don't have the recipe and might have had Cain not killed him. What if Cain and Abel had worked together and prepared a joint offering and Abel helped Cain learn how to prepare his vegetables in a more palatable manner? Maybe Cain could provide produce to feed Abel's flock and in turn Abel could teach Cain how to prepare his produce in a more pleasing manner to the Lord. Cain failed to see it as an opportunity where all could benefit including himself and instead of cooperating with Abel took competition too far, was a poor loser, and killed his brother. Or, that's one way to look at it.

To avoid suggesting the Lord should've handled anything differently or guided Cain and Abel towards cooperation and seeing each other as beneficial to each other or potentially so, I'm going to turn to discussing modern parenting in hopes all parents can avoid raising Cain. (John Lithgow is still awesome and if you thought of that too, glad you found this sermon.)

In my years ministering primarily to struggling families, I've found some patterns or commonalities where some of the solutions employed resulted in radicalizing the children and turning them into activists for life where some activists resort to violent vigilantism as part of their protest. Benign neglect seems harmless on the surface but often includes providing allowance without requiring chores and just out of celebration of the existence of the child alone. As the child matures, he/she has been conditioned to expect gratuities simply for being themselves. Sometimes those who engage in benign neglect or providing allowance without requiring chores use chores solely as a punishment. So, we

see the mentality that implies anyone who works for a living is less than, criminal, or should be dehumanized when compared to those who do not have to work for a living. That results in animosity and is quite divisive socially sometimes arguably provoking violent uprisings.

Below is a table that may help explain the message you as a parent or provider is sending or has sent to your child or dependent:

HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC POLICY	POTENTIAL MESSAGE RECEIVED
My dependent is required to do chores beyond self-care (i.e. cleaning own bedroom, bathing, schoolwork, etc.) without compensation and under duress or with penalties for failure to do chores.	I'm a slave. I am coerced to work without compensation under threat of penalty for failure to obey.
My dependent is required to do chores beyond self-care (as described above) and is compensated with an allowance though penalties exist for failure which may include denial of allowance.	<p>I earn my money and have a good work ethic while understanding where I slack I lack.</p> <p>This one best prepares a dependent for independence once reaching age of majority. If uncertain how to calculate an appropriate compensation system within your budget, here's what I'd suggest:</p> <p>The federal minimum wage for minors is \$4.25/hour. The dependent/minor should at least get \$4.25/hour of doing chores that benefit others in the household. So, if the child does 1 hour of chores per day (even if split up into 15 or 30 minute intervals on assigned tasks) then they would earn \$29.75/week. Housekeepers make between \$10-\$34/hour in the USA, but, taxes are withheld and there is no benefit of improving one's own environment for those housekeepers where taking the lesser \$4.25/hour is balanced out by improving one's own environment or contributing to that too. This will inspire them to respect the value of their own labor in economic terms. Of course, if only doing 30 minutes a day, it amounts to \$15/week roughly in allowance.</p>
My dependent is only required to do chores or work as a punishment otherwise they are as entitled as I am.	I hate work and feel anyone who has to work is deserving of punishment and ridicule. The only time I have to work is as

	<p>punishment and when being ridiculed by my provider. Good people shouldn't have to work at all. It's dehumanizing. I feel superior and entitled, maybe I'll join PETA so I can claim moral superiority and judge other people who work hard while calling that morally superior because I'm saving lives through my own unpaid voluntary contributions where no one forces me and I get praised and accepted for conforming and redistributing the wealth of my entitled provider for a "good cause".</p>
<p>My dependent is happy to help and graciously celebrates when I can afford to provide any upgrades or gifts.</p>	<p>I'm poor and everyone I know works so hard and is so tired that I am compelled to help out because everything's a struggle. I wish I could do more and that we were all more financially secure. I'm getting a job as soon as I am old enough so I can help even more. What's PETA? Why do they hate my family? We just went to McDonald's as a treat and were yelled at, accused of murder, and protested. Who does that? Is that actually their job? I don't get it. I want to protest them, but, too busy with being responsible. My uncle works in agriculture. Does PETA want to kill jobs? We can't afford that, sorry.</p>

So, in the microcosm sense, parents whose children exhibit what some label "entitled" behavior are not recognizing their own failures nor willing to address them which suggests the parents are like Cain or narcissistic because they refuse to take responsibility for their own failures and self-correct. They'd rather pay someone else or demand the government do something about the "entitled child" than take responsibility and make changes themselves. And, there is a whole industry dedicated to taking that money and enabling the narcissistic parents and their abuse and neglect rather than hold the real culprits accountable. However, the natural consequence of choosing that option is often radicalization of the youth which can be benign in legal activism and advocacy or malignant with violent vigilantism in response to the injustice.

Think about it from the child's perspective. You have a child or teen who has only known their own life experience which is limited mostly to family and school, maybe church too. The child/teen's "normal" is getting an allowance and basically staying out of the parent's hair when not some social tagalong with no other responsibilities. The child wants some guidance, but, doesn't know what they need because they are a child/teen and the parent is supposed to provide that. The parent doesn't want to and is too busy or self-

absorbed. The parent doesn't wish to self-examine, make any changes, nor be inconvenienced in any way. The parent hears about segregated congregate care such as "therapeutic boarding schools" or "residential treatment centers" where the program will do everything for them to prepare their child for life and all they have to do is pay for it or find a government agency or insurance carrier who will if they can show their child is incorrigible, disturbed, has a learning disability, or any behavioral "problems" whatsoever including being oppositional in response to a neglectful and narcissistic parent. And, then off to private placement in a private prison without due process for responding normally to environmental conditions and conditioning.

The child is spirited away sometimes in restraints like handcuffs to often a location in another state by strangers to be placed with strangers. The facility has taken the parent's word for it that the youth is in need of behavior modification/coercive thought reform. The child is assumed to be a liar, criminal narcissist, and deserving of any labor exploitation because if they won't do their chores at home for an allowance, they'll do them at the program without one to learn to appreciate their allowance. But, the failure in communication is often that the youth enrolled never had to do chores for an allowance and only as a punishment so it reinforces opposition to working or contributing rather than encouraging it because all work is seen as a punishment due to previous conditioning which is only reinforced in prison-like settings where forced or coerced labor is part of the program. Then, if they survive arguably being trafficked from their perspective (and the law has agreed with that in cases involving those on the watch-list) and in many cases without due process, they nobly focus on addressing the injustice through activism and sometimes unfortunately and viciously violent vigilantism. But, that's understandable given how they've been treated, right? And, it can feel like a conspiracy involving the parents, possibly school, the segregated congregate care provider, and all of them to the child. This can result in their not trusting anyone as you might imagine and therefore delayed reporting of any labor violations, sex trafficking, abuse, torture, and false imprisonment.

And, as far as diagnosing anyone with such a horrible experience as paranoid, that's bullshit. I'd love for someone to come kidnap anyone who would diagnose another human being as being paranoid and surround them with people judging and monitoring their every move for an extended period of time without due process and see if they in turn are diagnosed as paranoid by those monitoring them. You surround anyone at any time outside of segregated congregate care and what happens? The surrounded person is afraid and goes into fight or flight mode and if unable to fight or escape will often escape mentally through magical/wishful thinking so it causes or exacerbates such tendencies without helping to resolve them. Say you are at a park or even in a schoolyard. A child has been singled out and is being picked on by a couple of bullies while other kids watch, point, and laugh or comment too with their own jibes or criticism. If that happens to that child every day, isn't it natural they may seem a bit paranoid but in full context they are not paranoid because there are people harassing them daily and making them feel alienated from society in some way? It's not entirely the fault of school, clinical, or hospital settings because they do try and need to keep a professional and/or cold distance from their patients/clients/students. But, that can make the enrolled feel like lab

specimens in some bizarre experiment where no one will listen to them who has any power to change things. And, since that's what the "treatment" experience was like, they now refuse anything that calls itself "treatment" and are terrified of it because now that's a trigger word for traumatic stress. You don't have to be surrounded by people either to get that sense so you can empathize. What if you were surrounded by any other living creature including bees, wild wolf packs, or even housecats? What if they were just circling you and watching you but you didn't know why or what to do about it? Would it be right for me or anyone else to say you are being paranoid in that situation or if you now respond to any crowding with a bit of traumatic stress and now they call that paranoia after the fact of such an experience? Ignorance and prejudice are the problem for some and arrogance to serve greed while exploiting the vulnerable may be the greater evil.

So, details matter as does full context. Cain's actions were objectively wrong because it was extremely shortsighted and did not result in Cain benefiting from it at all unless becoming famous in some way counts. But, he did not get the praise he was seeking. So, he did not reach his goal by killing his brother unless his goal was to punish the Lord and if so the Lord exiled him to wander the earth arguably because the philosophies were incompatible. And, I'm willing to say I believe Abel is in heaven or reincarnated and still working to restore paradise with the rest of us who maintain good faith and do good works. And, it's possible that Adolf Hitler was Cain reincarnated. Hitler was a vegetarian and there are other similarities. But, I digress though not as much as some think I do. Regardless, Abel didn't deserve to be killed for pleasing God and for a wrathful God, Cain got off easy with exile rather than crucifixion or stoning if full context is considered. But, we can't over-generalize and liken every mistake to murder whether in seeking mercy or forgiveness or justice. You interrupt me, I do that too and I forgive you. You rape me, I want you dead or in prison (modern exile) forever. You murder me, I'll leave that up to my loved ones and hope there is enough evidence to convict in court. And, I wouldn't rape anyone and would only kill in defense of myself and/or others. So, when I self-examine I know I wouldn't rape anyone ever and would only kill in defense of myself and/or others. In fact, if I raped a child I'd want the death penalty and accept that because I'd believe I was a threat to society and if unable to control myself to such an extent that death would be merciful and appropriate. So, in the event that's what was meant when Socrates was accused of corrupting youth, then, he chose as I would choose rather than choosing exile. Historically, convicts were given a choice and I think convicts should still get that choice. However, I'm inclined to see Socrates as a moral construct created by Plato and that Socrates was guilty of suggesting youth question authority rather than corrupting through sodomy of some sort with a double entendre in play with the notion of "corrupting" and how varying perspectives on that can lead to varying interpretations. I think Plato was agreeing with Jesus that CHOMOS who corrupt through rape should get the death penalty while sarcastically on the sly suggesting that when CHOMOS run things it is those who question authority who get pinched, crucified, and/or falsely accused. I do understand the timeline and so you could say I believe Jesus was in agreement with Plato if considering history in sequence.

Mutual respect and simply educating through open communication a basic understanding of economics that is age appropriate while raising children would resolve so many social issues and that's on the parents where some parents believe that's on everyone else particularly the schools. So, if you want children who are responsible, be responsible yourself and lead by example while helping prepare your child for independent living by reasonably establishing some microcosm of the larger economic system. If age appropriate, explain what benefits they get (or remind them such as food, shelter, clothing, transportation, allowance, etc.) and what responsibilities (i.e. chores) come with that while understanding the law requires you provide most of that and deprivation could result in criminal charges for neglect but also institutionalization of the child who reports it given the current state of the foster care system. But, if you provide financial freedom without requiring responsibility, you've conditioned a child to be entitled and failed them miserably which is only compounded by institutionalization. And, if you think "I wish that was my problem", you understand that affluent narcissists are evil too and with affluence they can do more with their evil than those who lack affluence. Regardless, it all creates misery and a giant mess some of us who care about society are willing to address to defend and protect the greater good which remains the majority at this time regardless of some media outlets who suggest otherwise.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church/feedback.htm>. For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church>

and

<http://www.heal-online.org>