

Proper 14 B  
August 12th, 2018  
Ephesians 4:25-5:2  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

**Anger**  
**“Be Angry, but do not sin”**

Many of us, myself included, struggle with the notion that God is an angry God, a God who is ready to punish us for our sins. We feel unworthy, unholy, unredeemed and count our sins as unforgivable.

Surely the story of Noah's Ark, so early in the scriptures, teaches us that God is an angry God, ready to punish the world and wipe out God's mistakes in creation. By our misbehavior, we were God's mistakes. Remember the flood? God will never again destroy the earth. So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.” [Genesis 6:13]

And I need not remind you of the story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers in the Temple. Jesus showed his anger with those who took advantage of the faithful and of religious faith. He was not pleased. Luke 19:46 records what Jesus had to say: ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’

So God gets angry. Very angry! We are created in the image of God. We get angry. Is it wrong to be angry? But the anger of God is different from ours in that it is about a disruption in the harmony of creation which must be put right again, healed.

Anger is an emotion. It is a feeling. Feelings and emotions are not wrong. They are not sins. God did not teach us “do not be angry because it is a sin. God said, “Be angry, but do not sin. It is all a matter of what you do with your anger.

Anger can be a survival tool for those who have been seriously threatened or wronged. Their anger can protect them from further harm. Staying angry is not a helpful or good thing for us. Anger demands resolution. There is a time to make peace, if with no one else, other than our own selves, our hearts, our minds. Harboring anger can also damage us, spiritually and psychologically.

Anger is like a spark, just like faith. It is like a flame burning at the tip of a candle. Fire, when it is under control, can be a helpful thing to bring light into our lives in order to dispel darkness, or warmth for our souls in the hearth and fireplace. But a fire which is fed and allowed to be fueled, which is exposed to the winds to blow it about and burns uncontrolled becomes a wildfire, like the ones we have witnessed on TV recently in the news about California. Imagine the damage anger can do to you when it gets out of control. We would neither want to wield it or be the victim of such anger.

So what do we do with the pain of anger that may burn hot within us or smolder somewhere in the recesses of our minds? Is there anything wrong with being angry? No. We can be angry, but we must not sin with our anger, and we should work to make peace with the object of our anger. But the caveat here is not to sin, not to lower yourself to the level of the sin that hurt you, not to act in a like manner to the perpetrator of your harm. The old law of an eye for an eye, and ear for an ear, has been tossed out and overthrown: [Matthew 5:38-48]

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Jesus turns the whole issue about anger upside down. We are not to seek revenge. We are not to turn the subjects of our anger into enemies. Those with whom we are most angry are often some of those who have been close to us, like friends and family members.

Resolve your anger. But how do we do that? The passage of time helps, but that is a very passive way to go about it, leaving relationships broken, and ourselves broken and hurting. Unresolved anger is a blot on our souls and blocks finding peace.

Jesus speaks strongly of resolving anger in Matthew 5:22:

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” Do not play with fire. Do not sin with it. Use the fire to cleanse yourself.

Rechannel your anger creatively to help with injustice in the world and do good with it instead of harm. Seek Justice for others who are downtrodden, even if and because you found no justice in your anger. Do not be angry with others. Be angry with injustice. Be angry with sin.

Leaving anger to fester may mean that we will dump it later on on the innocent bystanders in our lives, usually our families, sometimes our friends. When I am angry at work, and stuff my anger or do not express it out of fear, it does not go away. It sits simmering in my mind and heart. I bring it home with me, and then I stumble on a molehill and make an angry volcano out of myself. We have all done that, and too often, we have experienced someone dumping anger on us. Think about road rage.

The resolution of anger is and should be a more active pursuit. And the words prayer and forgiveness are the tools for resolving anger. I was very angry with someone who hurt me. The anger festered and burned hot within me, and poured out when ever I heard that person’s name. And then came a time when I realized that the anger was doing more harm to me, than the other person ever did. It was like being infected with a cancer eating away at my soul. I began to resolve my anger by praying for that person. Prayer will transform you and your anger. You cannot pray for someone and not start to love them in a Christian way. You cannot start to pray for someone without learning to see things from their perspective.

Last of all, let me point out what a wise person once said to me: you can be really angry at someone else, but in the end, who do you think the person is you are most angry at? That’s right, yourself. Be angry, because it is human to be angry. Pray for those you are angry with. But move to healing through your prayers, and then engage the process of forgiveness. God doesn’t want us to be punching bags. We will never forget the hurt. We will never be so foolish to be victims of such harm that makes us rageful again, I hope. But at some point, you have to let the anger go and forgive the object of your feelings of hate and disgust. You will realize the wisdom of Jesus, because the anger will do you more harm than they ever did to you, both physically and spiritually. Make peace. Pray. Love. And as hard as it is, try not to let the sun go down on your anger. AMEN