

“Deadly Sins: Anger”

Place: Lakewood UMC

Date: February 21, 2016

Texts: Ephesians 4:25-32; Romans 12:14-21

Theme: Anger

Occasion: Seven Deadly Sins, series

Anger; that’s a tough one. We’re in the midst of our series on the seven deadly sins and today we consider the sin of anger. Anger takes a lot of different forms. Sometimes it’s expressed as loud shouting and screaming, and sometimes we express it through quiet, passive resistance.

There are times when we express our anger directly at the person we’re upset with. And there are occasions when we will displace our anger, and vent it on someone or something else. Sometimes we do it consciously and other times we’re not even aware of what we’ve just done.

Of all the human emotions, anger is perhaps the most frightening. Anger that goes unchecked can lead to violence and even death. The feeling of anger is not a sin; it’s an emotion and we’re allowed to feel our emotions.

But how we express it can certainly be sinful. There are way too many stories in the news about a person who got so angry that they pulled out a gun or knife and killed another person. Most of us are familiar with the expression *road rage*, which unchecked can become deadly. We’ve heard stories about sports coaches who scream at their players for missing a tackle or something like that. But how about the coach who attacked his own player with a metal folding chair because he was so angry with how he played on the basketball court? Anger management issues, do you think?

We're becoming a much more violent society and anger is certainly a factor in that violent behavior. Anger, it is obvious, is a deadly sin. It's deadly in a literal sense – someone shooting another person. But it's also deadly to our spirit and our soul – something dies inside us when we allow anger to rule our lives.

Anger is a poison that can eat away at you, and even make you sick. Dr. Radford Williams, a Duke University researcher did a study that showed young men who were prone to outbreaks of anger were seven times more likely to die of a heart attack by the age of 50. Anger kills not only others, but it's deadly to ourselves as well.

Anger can be scary. It's scary to other people, because they may not know what the other person is capable of doing. It can be frightening to our self as well. It's an awful feeling to suddenly realize, almost as you leave your own body, "Oh my goodness, I'm out of control." And you can't stop yourself from going on and on.

Part of getting our anger back under control is learning the conditions that make us prone to anger. If we can understand what leads up to our angry emotion, we have a better chance of getting it under control. I'd like to suggest, in a humorous way, some ideas that might get you thinking about what sets up anger in your life.

1. If you want to be an angry person, be a perfectionist. Expect perfection in everything and everyone. Then, if anyone doesn't live up to your expectations, consider it your duty to rant and rave and show the world how wrong this person or situation is. Being a perfectionist and expecting others to be perfect will set you up for becoming an angry person. How about, lighten up?
2. If you want to be miserable and angry, overload your schedule.

Make yourself so busy that you're always on edge. You see, if you plan so many things to do, if anything changes your plans, you're going to be stressed. You'll be wound as tight as a rubber band, ready to snap at the slightest thing. Often, angry people are working on overloaded schedules.

3. If you want to be angry, never laugh and have a good time. Take yourself and the world extremely seriously. If there isn't any humor or levity in your life, you might be on the path to becoming an angry person. Learn to laugh at life and yourself.
4. If you like being angry, practice shouting at people. Disregard what common sense tells you, that speaking in a quiet voice brings about understanding and harmony. If you don't get your way, practice yelling like a three year-old. Honestly, a softer voice will tone down the anger in many situations.
5. Finally, if you really want to be an angry person, learn to nag, learn to nitpick, practice criticism and the snide remark. You see, if you don't point out the faults in other people, who's going to do it for them? Do it in public to show you really mean business. Well, maybe we need to dial it back a notch and practice a little more kindness. Too many people live this way.

Now you know, or I hope you know, I was being sarcastic here. It is too easy to be angry and most people don't need any advice on how to do it. Anyone can get angry and of course everyone does get angry, sometimes. Some are loud about it and others quietly harbor their resentments, refusing to speak or withholding affection.

The apostle Paul offers us some advice about anger.

Let's look again at Romans chapter 12; there are several verses that can help us. In vs 14 Paul says: "*Bless* those who make you angry." What's *that* mean? Well, instead of harboring that resentment, instead of replaying that last conversation over and over again in your mind, offer a prayer for the person to whom you're feeling angry. Pray for them.

In verse 19 we read: "Do not take revenge." Don't even entertain the thoughts of planning revenge; that's harboring a resentment, which leads to anger. Give it up.

Tell God how this person makes you feel and then ask God to help you feel differently. Vengeance belongs to God, not to us. If we start playing God, we're in a deadly game.

Verse 21 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I think it epitomizes the Gospel of Jesus. It's more than simply "Be a nice person." Listen to it again: "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." In other words, that person who makes you angry, think of some way to do good for him or her.

Love is the most powerful force in the world; never doubt it. I'm not talking about the feeling of love, but the action of love. When I'm feeling angry towards another person, I don't feel like loving that person. But if I take the action of love, God transforms that situation.

Watchman Nee, famous Christian and Chinese author, tells the story of a Chinese Christian who owned a rice paddy. His neighbor was a communist. To irrigate his rice paddy, the Christian pumped water manually out of a nearby canal.

Each day, after the Christian has pumped enough water

to fill his field, the communist would come out and remove some of the board that kept the water in his neighbor's field. In this way he flooded his own field without having to do any work.

The Christian was beside himself with anger. Not knowing where else to turn, he took his complaint to God. The Lord, hearing his prayer, gave him an answer.

The next morning the Christian got up much earlier and started pumping water into the field of his communist neighbor. Then he replaced the boards and pumped water into his own rice paddy.

In a few weeks, both fields of rice were doing well. Not only that, but his communist neighbor came to know Christ. That's how it's done, turning our anger over to the Lord and letting God guide us. Then we take the actions of love, repaying evil with good.

In the passage from Ephesians we read earlier, Paul tells us to try not to let the sun go down on our anger. Why? - Because anger that sticks around in your head for very long begins to eat away at you. So it's better to resolve your anger sooner, rather than later, even before going to bed if you can.

Anger is deadly stuff. You can let anger eat at you like battery acid, spoiling your life or even destroying it. Or, you can give it over to God. Our task as followers of Jesus is to give our anger to God and ask God to deal with it for us.

Anger: its deadly stuff. Better to give it away than to feed it. Amen? Amen!