

“Sinners and Saints: Anger!”

Psalm 62:1-8 • Ephesians 4:25-5:2

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 21, 2019

One day last week we were eating in Chick-fil-a and the place was crowded as it usually is. At one of the tables was a group of boys who were probably 13 or 14. They were waiting for their food and talking and laughing when a woman comes in who was apparently the mother of one of the boys. She began to scream at him and then at the boys at the table with him, using words that shouldn't be repeated. They were certainly not the kind of words a mother should say to her own child.

On several college campuses in the last few years there have been violent protests organized because the groups rioting didn't like what they thought a speaker would say. You may remember the riots Berkeley that involved smashing windows and starting fires. All because they disagreed with someone invited to speak on campus.

Just last month in a rural area near Sinton, an incident of road rage ended with a teen killed and his father sent to the hospital. Road rage, where people express extreme anger while driving, is at an all-time high and keeps getting worse. Keep in mind that the term “road rage” didn't even exist before 1987.

Our culture today has been described as “outrage culture.” Turn on the news or your social media and you will mostly see and hear people who are outraged at something or someone. We have a huge problem with anger in our culture. And I suspect some of you struggle with it personally as well.

This morning we are looking at deadly sin of anger. Anger is defined as “a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.” Actually, anger itself is not sinful. Anger is an emotional response to a real or perceived offense or injustice. So there are situations when anger can reasonably be justified. For example, human trafficking and abortion are two situations that justify the feeling of anger because they involve the strong overpowering and oppressing the weak and innocent. Jesus was angry with the

Jewish leaders who were taking advantage of people. He ended up driving out the money changers and the people who were selling over priced animals for the sacrifices.

In Mark 3, Jesus goes into a synagogue on the Sabbath where he meets a man with a deformed hand. We're told that the Jewish leaders watched to see if Jesus would heal the man on the Sabbath so that they could accuse him. Mark says that Jesus “looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.” In our reading from Ephesians, Paul says, “Be angry and do not sin.” I think Jesus shows us what this sinless anger looks like. He was angry at the sin of the leaders. But he was also grieved.

This also helps us see what sinful anger looks like. I think a better word for the sin would be wrath or rage. Rage is defined as “violent, uncontrollable anger.” The idea of wrath or rage is really anger that is then directed at someone else. It's anger that is expressed. Dallas Willard tells the story of a pastor at a very large church that became angry with one of his staff because of something that happened during a worship service. As soon as the service was over the pastor found this employee and chewed him up one side and down the other. All while his lapel mic was still on. That's rage.

Deep down, at the heart of wrath is pride. The reason we are willing to chew someone out is because we are putting our self ahead of the other. And so when we think someone has done something to us we lash out. “How dare you do that to me??” The other thing that leads us to wrath or rage is holding on to previous hurts that anger us so that they build up. However, much like envy, wrath is never positive. It doesn't make you feel any better. It's never enjoyable for anyone.

If you get a leak in your roof you temporarily put a bucket under it to catch the drip. Think about your emotions such as anger as being like

those drops of water in the bucket. Everything is fine as long as there's still room in the bucket to hold the water. But when the bucket gets full to the top every drop splashes out. That's how anger works. If we don't deal with whatever caused the anger in the first place, it will continue to fill the bucket. Then even small things will cause you to lash out. What's the answer? In Ephesians 4:26 God says, "do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." In other words, resolve the issue today so that it doesn't become sinful tomorrow.

The contrary virtue that is opposite of wrath is patience. The reason patience is the opposite of wrath is because wrath involves taking matters into your own hands and in the heat of the moment. Patience means waiting until you have calmed down and can think clearly. Most of all, patience means waiting for God to act. This is a tough one. Most of us don't like to wait. We live in an impatient world with everything at our fingertips. But the virtue of patience is even more difficult because patience must be learned and the only way to learn patience is by enduring things that require patience. That's why you should never *pray* for patience. God won't just zap you and make you patient. Instead, He will put you over and over in situations that require patience until you learn to be patient.

The best way to learn patience is to practice the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude. In Psalm 62, King David writes about being treated unjustly. He has every right to be angry and we might even think he has the right to seek revenge. In verse 3 he says, "How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?" We see that David is attacked and then lied about and lied to. "They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths but inwardly they curse."

Psalm 37, which was our Call to Worship, tells a similar story. "The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him...The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to

slay those whose way is upright." But instead of turning to anger that becomes wrath, instead of taking matters into our own hands (or our mouths), we are to wait patiently for God to handle it.

The question, then, is whether you trust God to handle your situation. Psalm 37:3 says, "Trust in the Lord," and verse 5 says, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will act." And Psalm 62:8 tells us, "Trust in him at all times." The way we learn to trust God like that is by NOT acting ourselves. That's where the discipline of silence and solitude comes in. Psalm 62 begins, "For God alone my soul waits in silence," and Psalm 37:7 tells us, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." Maybe the best known verse about this is Psalm 40:10, "Be still and know that I am God."

Here's the thing. We are surrounded by almost constant noise. We have TVs in almost every room. I knew someone who was building a house and they put a TV even in every bathroom! We have radios in our cars, our phones now give us access to music and entertainment, restaurants now have giant TVs on every wall with different shows on each one PLUS they have music playing, often very loudly. We rarely experience silence and the result is that we are always distracted. Our souls are not still. We don't hear God.

The answer is silence. On purpose. Alone. Blaise Pascal said, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Because we are so distracted all of the time, when we find ourselves alone and without any noise it makes us uncomfortable. We begin to have thoughts. Maybe we don't like the thoughts we have. Maybe we begin to think about things that have hurt us or made us mad. And that's good. Because we need to think through those things and deal with them.

The secret is not just being silent and alone but spending that time thinking and reflecting on who God is and what He has done for you. The idea is that you must focus your attention on how you have offended God and away from how others have offended you. As you think,

reflect, and pray about how God has forgiven you, you will find that it's much easier to forgive others.

That leads us to the other spiritual discipline that will help you replace anger with patience: forgiveness. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving* one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

1 Corinthians 13:4 says, "love is patient." We learn from Jesus that love is always a sacrifice. So we learn to be patient when we love God and love others. And if you truly love and are learning patience through silence and solitude, you will find your anger and wrath diminishing and in its place you will find Jesus.

Amen.