

## Anger

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

I like what St. Paul advises in our reading this morning from Ephesians 4:26... he says, "*Be angry - but do not sin; and do not let the sun go down on your anger*"...

In other words, there's nothing sinful about being angry (and I say that because we know that even Jesus got angry from time to time)... I might even add that if you *don't* find yourself getting angry (especially when you witness social injustices, or persecution, or the mistreatment of others) that it should also make you question your own faith (and make you wonder why)...

But what St. Paul is telling us is that we shouldn't let that anger *live within us* for very long (not even for a single day) so that the anger doesn't consume us (or take root within us)... Instead, St. Paul is encouraging us to let it go (and turn our attention to the Lord) – whether it be through prayer, patience, or the constant pursuit of peace....

Now the question is, "why?" ... Why is Paul so concerned with Christians stoking the fires of anger (in the first place)?...

Well, Paul says this... he says, "Because when you do that *you allow room in your heart and in your mind for the devil to take root*" ... and we all know that the devil is not only a spiritual force that works against the goodness of God, but the devil also seeks to bring us destruction, and pain., and death, (and regret) ... and anger, as you know, is the porch that leads into the house of trouble...

And so Paul is urging believers in Ephesus (who are struggling to be faithful while being persecuted themselves) to stay in control of themselves... to keep their eyes on the prize and on their mission... to keep on the path that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven (and to not get sidetracked with petty grievances, little annoyances – or even the desire to get even with people who've hurt them)...

because when you allow anger to come into your heart – it seems to me that what Paul is trying to say – is that it might feel good at first - like we see in those who naively mix politics and religion - (but in the end what you're really doing is playing with fire) – because there's a really good chance (that the person you're going to hurt the most – when you allow anger to live within your heart - is your own self)...

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Which is why the Chinese proverb says, “*Stab a man when you’re angry – and you’ll pierce your own heart*” ...

You know, I can remember having a really bad day years ago (here at Faith)... and it was one of those days where everything that could go wrong (did go wrong)... to make matters worse, I hadn’t eaten lunch and I was hungry... and to be completely honest (I wasn’t in a good mood)... in fact, I was angry...

And I’m not saying that I’m perfect (I’m far from it) but I really do try (very hard) not to bring my work home with me... (of course, when you basically live where you work *it’s easier said than done*)... and it was one of those days when I forgot the words of Benjamin Franklin - who once said, “*Speak when you’re angry - and you’ll give the best speech you’ll ever regret*” ...

And so, that evening I went over to the parsonage (angry at what took place that day)... and as I walked into the house I stepped on one of Erin’s toys (that she had left on the living room floor)... and I don’t remember my exact words but I did give a speech (about how when I was a child we had to put our toys away – how we didn’t have any toys - how I almost broke my ankle – and that if she didn’t want the toys we could give them away to charity)... it was a great speech... a dramatic speech...

And then I proceeded to tell Nora how I felt she could be doing more to help out around the house... and how I wasn’t going to come home every night to a mess...

And of course, this was followed up with door slamming, some tears, and an awful lot of regret (on my part afterwards) ... and I can remember feeling horrible that night for misdirecting my anger (and for simply being a jerk)...

and yes, I did apologize - but I’m firm believer that even with apologies (we still do damage when we allow our anger to take over)...

But what really made me feel horrible was when Erin came into my room later that evening (with an arm full of her stuffed animals)... and she asked me if I wanted to play with them... and so we had a little tea party where I was introduced to all of these stuffed animals by name... and there was ‘Cheer Bear’ and ‘Pinky’ and ‘Brainy’ ... and Erin mentioned that she was the ‘Fairy God Mother’ ...

And so I said, “*And who am I going to be?*” ...

Erin thought about it for a minute and then said, “*You can be ‘Grumpy Bear’*” ...

And so I said, “*Why do I have to be called ‘Grumpy Bear’?*...”

And I’ll always remember how serious she was when she looked at me and she said, “*Because that’s just how you are Daddy*” ...

The point of sharing that story with you is to remind you (that when we let our anger get the best of us – and when we aren’t careful with what we say (and how we say it) yes, we can (and should) all apologize (but the truth is that *unleashed anger* also does it’s damage)... it can end up costing you your peace of mind – your sobriety – it can cost you money (if you break things)... and it can even end up costing you your freedom (if you were to really let loose and hurt someone)...

But even more importantly –when you allow anger to have its way with you (what you’re really hurting the most - is your relationship with God)... this is why it tells us in James 1:19, “*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger – for one’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires*”

In fact, Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:30 that we “*grieve the Holy Spirit*” ... and the word that Paul is using in Greek (which is ‘lupeo’) means to ‘let down, cause pain or to disappoint’... the same way we disappoint ourselves when we say and do things that we later regret...

But instead, St. Paul says that as Children of God we should be ‘Imitators of God’ (who, as you know, is patient with us and is slow to anger)... that we should always strive to ‘live in love’ (even when it’s difficult)... and put away everything that tears down (and replace it with the things of God that edify and build up the people around us) in hopes that (rather than offend them or get even with them) we might lead them to Christ (and we might live the ‘*righteous life that God desires*’ ...

And listen, maybe you’ve come here this morning and you have your own reasons for being angry (and maybe it’s because someone hurt you – or said something to annoy you – or whatever it is) and I’m sure that you can come up with plenty of reasons why your own anger is justified... and I am sure that given the opportunity you could make your own speech...

But what I’m trying to get you to see this morning is that (justified or not) anger brings with it a price tag... (and I know you’re free to live however you want to live) but is that really the path that you want to be on?... do you really want to be filled with anger (and have to pay for it with your peace of mind)?... and is that what you want to invite into your life?...

I wouldn't think so – but do you remember that story in the Bible (where Jesus meets a man who finds himself sitting by a pool in Bethsaida for 38 long years)?... if so, you remember that the man was helpless to help himself... in fact, the Bible tells us that he was powerless to change (the same way many of us may feel when we find ourselves getting angry)... we feel powerless to control it... and some people have even learned to live with the image of being a “grumpy Bear”...

But here's a very interesting question that Jesus asks the man (and would be asking us if we turned to him when we're feeling like we're going to explode)... he asks, “*Do you want to be healed?*”...

Now what kind of question is that?... of course the man would want to be healed, right?... Well not necessarily – the same way not everyone who gets angry is willing to let it go...

And the reason why many people won't turn to God when they're feeling angry – and won't use the tools that we have as Christians – is because many people don't believe in the power of God... and they don't believe that their faith can make a difference... so instead they never use it...

But let me close with one of my favorite stories (that I want you to think about the next time you're feeling angry)... it's a story (that some of you have heard) about a pastor and a soap-maker who went for a walk together... and as they were walking the soap maker had some negative things to say about religion and started by saying: “*What good is religion?... Just look around you.... what do you see?... Trouble, misery, wars - even after all these years and years of preaching and teaching about goodness, truth, peace.... What good is religion with all its prayers and sermons if all this evil still exists?...*”

The pastor kept quiet as they continued their walk...

Then they noticed a child playing in the gutter... The child was just filthy with dirt and mud... and the pastor said to the soap maker: “*Look at this child!... Now you say that soap makes people clean, but what good is it?... With all the soap in the world this child is still dirty.... What good is soap after all?*”

The soap maker immediately answered him: “*But pastor, soap can't do its job if it isn't used!*”

*"That's exactly right," said the minister... "And so it is with matters of faith... It won't accomplish anything - unless people use it!"...*

And friends, I share that with you today because – yes – there are going to be times when you're going to get hurt – you're going to get angry – you might even be filled with a desire to get revenge and hurt someone the same way they hurt you... and if anyone would have been justified to strike back in anger it would have been St. Paul (who was beaten, was persecuted, was flogged, insulted, and falsely accused and imprisoned)...

But always remember – there's another way to handle life's problems (and that's doing it God's way)...

And yes, we can all blow up and become 'Grumpy Bears' – but in the heat of the moment you can also turn to God – and you can still pray – and you can still walk away – and learn about patience - and most importantly (you're always free to let the petty nonsense in your life – that will only bring you down) – to be put away... so that you can begin to live the righteous life that God desires...

And the Good News is that when you turn to God to let Him in – the Bible tells us again and again – that He will come to us (and help us not only find rest for our soul) but the Lord will always help us find – another way... a better way (if we but put our faith - in Him)....

May the wisdom of God be our guiding light... May all of us seek to be instruments of God's peace and love... and May we always know of the Lord's healing touch in our lives...

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!**