

The 3rd Sunday of Lent: Holy Trinity Church: March 4, 2018

John 2: 13-22: *For God So Loved the World*

Preached

By

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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The late Paul Harvey told a great story about anger on his radio show. The story is about a bank robber in Oceanside, California wearing a motorcycle helmet and carrying a gun. The young man strode into a bank. He immediately selects a teller, a woman who appeared fiftyish, soft, kindly looking and an easy mark. He handed her a note demanding the money or her life. The woman reached for the cash drawer. Then she looked again at the note the robber gave her. Her eyes flashed with anger and her teeth clenched with rage. She pulled her entire cash drawer out, but instead of handing him the money, she clobbered the robber over the head with the money drawer. Caught by surprise, now dazed and confused, the robber's gun fell to the floor as she continued to hit him again and again and again scolding him with each whack. Money was flying everywhere. As she was beating him she kept

shouting, “shame on you, shame on you” bouncing the blows of her cash drawer off his helmet," until the robber turned and ran out of the bank. Police caught the young man cowering in a patch of shrubs nearby. Shortly after the capture, the police questioned the teller as to why; when she was just about ready to give the young man the money at gunpoint, that she suddenly became so enraged? She said, "In his note there was a very, very naughty word."

Different people get upset at different things. But there are times when all of us get angry. And sometimes the worst thing we can do is hold that anger in. Anger in and of itself is not the problem. It is the tendency we have to avoid or ignore expressing our anger appropriately that seems to be associated with frequent headaches and depression. In other words, many of us will hang on to our anger, resentments and hatreds massaging them for years and even life times. This massaging of our un-relinquished anger will eventually create an emotional cancerous tumor and that tumor will suck the life out of us as it grows and grows and grows all the while manifesting its' pathology in our lives.

The scientist and theologian, Teilhard de Chardin once said, “We are not human beings seeking a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience”

My dear sisters and brothers, I truly believe that anger gets a bad rap. I believe anger is a God given gift to us. Anger is an emotion created by God given to the human person in order to protect our holy spirits, our sacred souls, against the assault of insults, attacks and betrayals that all of us at various times in our lives suffer. Everyone gets angry from time to time. I believe anger is an inherent part of our human nature.

During my last two years of high school, I worked in the housekeeping department of Kent Hospital. One of the places I was assigned to regularly was the maternity ward and the nursery. I enjoyed standing at the big nursery windows watching the newborns. When those babies, just hours old, were not fed, or changed or attended to they got angry and they let everyone around them know it. No one teaches an infant how to be angry. Anger is an inherent natural response to an unfriendly environment.

In today's gospel from John, we see the classical case of anger in the scriptures as Jesus makes a whip in order to chase the merchants, moneychangers and priests out of the Temple. Jesus' spirit is deeply offended by what he sees in His Father's House. In today's gospel, Jesus is a spiritual being having a human experience. The greed and corruption He saw perpetrated an injustice upon all those who came to the Temple to sacrifice during Passover. So Jesus became angry and took action. His anger motivated

him to do something about the injustice being forced upon the common people. This is an example of righteous anger given a healthy expression. The anger is not used to attack a person, but to attack an entire system of injustice.

So, is it a sin to get angry? Anger in and of itself is not a sin. It was created by God to protect us when we are hurt. You and I get angry over all kinds of things-some of them exceedingly silly. Jesus got angry when he saw people and religion exploited for profit. Jesus came to seek out and to save the lost and the most vulnerable of this world. This was his purpose in life. Can you imagine how he felt when he saw religious leaders using religion not to help people but to take advantage of them? Jesus got angry when he saw people exploiting religion for their own gain, like the temple priests, the money changers and the merchants in the temple courts. People came from all over the known world to offer their sacrifices during Passover in Jerusalem. Many of them travelled great distances. The entire Temple system was designed to create a money making operation from beginning to end. You couldn't bring your own animal to sacrifice because it was considered ritually impure. You had to purchase a kosher animal in the temple court. You could not use Roman coins because they too were considered ritually unclean. After all, they bore the image of Caesar, which broke the commandment against graven images. So, the money changers were exchanging Roman coins for shekels,

temple coins, and making outrageous profits in the exchange at the expense of simple, believing and poor people. So, Jesus exploded, according to the picture we get from our Gospel reading today.

I believe, Jesus is always offended and angered when people and religion are exploited for profit. Jesus was offended and angered when the religious leaders elevated form over substance. God called these religious leaders to open the eyes of their people to the presence of the divine in their human hearts and in their human relationships. Instead, these leaders were loading the people down with useless laws and rituals all the while ignoring the real spiritual needs of their flock as they fleeced them and lined their own pockets. So yes, Jesus got steamed. Jesus got cheesed off and yes he fashioned a whip and drove the priests, money changers, merchants and animals out of the temple court. It is a dramatic scene. And it tells us something very important about Jesus. All Jesus truly cares deeply about is people. This is so very important for us to understand. At the heart of everything Jesus did was his great love for people.

The Jewish Law was not as important to Jesus as people, though he was a law-abiding Jew. The Jewish Tradition was not as important to Jesus as people, though he kept most of the sacred traditions of his people. The Jewish religion was not as important to Jesus as people, even though the Sabbath always

found him in the synagogue. But Jesus didn't come to die for the law or for a tradition or for a religion. Jesus came and died for people, not just some, but all people. All loved. All forgiven. All redeemed. All saved.

You know, there may be people that you and I disapprove of. They may not have the same moral standards and values as we do. They may not worship as we worship. They may be committed to a very different way of life, or a lifestyle that we find disturbing and maybe even repulsive. But, my dearest friends, Jesus loves every one of them. And Jesus didn't come to condemn them, but to forgive their sins from the cross and save them by dying on that cross. During Lent, Jesus calls us to this same kind of radical love and forgiveness.

When I was a kid in grade school we played a game at recess called "You're out! You're out! You can't come in!" The way the game was played was that half of the kids would form a circle. Everyone would face outward holding hands. The other half of the children would be outside the circle. The ones in the circle would chant, "You're out! You're out! You can't come in. You're out! You're out! You can't come in." And once they yelled this twice, the kids who were on the outside would rush as hard as they could and try to break into the circle. The ones in the circle could only hold hands, they couldn't lock

arms. And the ones who were trying to break in had to get in on the first try, they couldn't keep pushing. You and I know this little game, even if we never played it as a child. We've seen it played out all our lives on both a child's level and on an adult level, and sometimes, Heaven help us, it has been played out in the name of Jesus. Throughout human history, "You're out! You're out! You can't come in!" has been screamed at Jewish people, at Roman Catholic people, at Protestant people, at Muslim people, at atheist people and at agnostic people. That's a chant our beloved country has used on all kinds of people, isn't it? Throughout America's short history, "You're out! You're out! You can't come in" has certainly been screamed at women, at children, at the elderly, at Black people, at Irish people, at Italian people, at Hispanic people, at Asian people, at Gay people, at Lesbian people, and at Transgendered people, at poor people, at special needs people, at addicted people, at mentally ill people, at convicted people, at homeless people, at all those people who are disenfranchised, at marginalized people deemed to be different from us people.

You see my sisters and brothers in Christ; you can divide religious people into two very basic groups. Not the liberals and conservatives, not the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, not the Muslims and the Christians and the Jews, but the mean people and the non-mean people. That hurts, but it is so

true. All Jesus deeply cares about is people. Thanks be to God that includes you and me along with everyone else. None of us are worthy of it, but by the cross of Jesus Christ it includes every one of us. That's the message of the cross of Jesus the Christ and from that cross Jesus offers us forgiveness as we must accept forgiveness and offer forgiveness to all people. Why? Because, Jesus loves and deeply cares for all people. So, we disciples must do the same.

There is much about the theology of the cross we don't understand. But Scripture is quite clear on this point: Jesus went to the cross on our behalf. Why? Because God His Father and our Father so loved the world . . ." That is why Jesus drove the money-changers, the priests and the merchants from the Temple because Jesus deeply cares about people. Always has. Always will. This week my brothers and sisters, I challenge you. I invite you to make that faith your own. During this Lent make the choice and allow your soul that faith. Not legalistic faith that fills people with guilt and forgets to flood them with grace. Not moralistic faith that divides people into acceptable and unacceptable and forgets to remind us that we are all sinners saved by God's grace. I invite you to accept the authentic faith of Jesus, a faith that has one goal--to help all of us grow in love for one another and for God. A faith that tells us we really matter, not because there is anything remarkable about us,

but because there is something so remarkable about a God who so loves the world. Amen.