

**The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: August 12, 2018**

**Proper 14: Ephesians 4: 25-5:2: *Walk in Love as Christ Loved Us***

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**

**A man came to work one day with a bad limp. One of his coworkers noticed and asked him what had happened. The man answered, “Oh, nothing. It’s just an old hockey injury that acts up every once in a while.” The coworker was surprised at his answer. “I never knew you played hockey,” he said. The man explained, “Oh, I didn’t play hockey; I hurt it last year during the Stanley Cup play-offs. When I lost five hundred dollars on the final game, I put my foot through the TV set!” When we’re angry we do some pretty dumb things, don’t we? But we’ve all been in situations when things were so aggravating that we haven’t known what we could do with our fury.**

**Today, Paul addresses anger in his Epistle to the Ephesians, he writes: “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of***

*redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

**What a sublimely important message for our country and the world, so divided, so angry in which you and I live. Red states and blue states, white people and black, rich people and poor people, citizens and immigrants, we seem to be drifting farther apart. And here is something that you and I can agree on: Bitterness, rage and anger are dangerous emotions.**

**Does the name Rudy Tomjanovich ring a bell with you? Tomjanovich was an NBA basketball player who was seriously injured and could easily have been killed by a punch thrown in a game by a fellow basketball player named Kermit Washington. In a book titled simply *The Punch* John Feinstein tells the story of that tragic incident. On December 9, 1977, during an NBA game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Houston Rockets, a scuffle broke out between several players at mid-court. Washington, who played for the Lakers, saw Tomjanovich running toward the altercation. Not knowing that he intended to break up the fight Tomjanovich had a reputation around the**

league as a peacemaker. Washington hit Tomjanovich with a vicious roundhouse punch. The blow, which took Tomjanovich by surprise, fractured his face and left Tomjanovich unconscious in a pool of blood in the middle of the arena. The punch nearly killed him, and resulted in severe medical problems that ultimately ended his playing career. Tomjanovich's life was certainly shaped by that moment in a variety of ways, but "even more so, probably, this incident has shaped Kermit Washington's life. He will forever and perhaps primarily," says John Feinstein, "be known as the man who threw that punch." Though Kermit Washington had a good reputation off the court, he could not escape the notoriety that flowed from that act of anger and violence. He and his wife instantly became ostracized from many in their social circle. They had a two-year-old daughter, and Washington's wife was eight months pregnant with the couple's first son at the time of the punch. His wife recalls that she and the children were treated like pariahs after the incident. Her obstetrician told her to get another doctor to deliver her child. Her friends asked her what kind of person was Kermit Washington that he could commit such a vile and cruel act. Kermit Washington went on to have a solid NBA career, but he will always be remembered for that momentary lapse of judgment when he nearly ended a fellow basketball player's life.

**My sisters and brothers, bitterness, rage and anger are dangerous emotions. Unfortunately, such displays of destructive emotions are becoming almost routine in our society. Two shoppers in a supermarket got into a fistfight over who should be first in a newly opened checkout lane. An airline flight returned to a major American city after a passenger was accused of throwing a can of beer at a flight attendant and biting a pilot. One father in an eastern state beat another father to death in an argument over rough play at their sons' hockey practice. A high school baseball coach in the South turned himself in to face charges that he broke an umpire's jaw after a disputed call. All these events were reported by *USA Today* over the span of just a few months.**

**Bad tempers are on display everywhere. The media is constantly reporting incidents of road rage, airplane rage, biker rage, surfer rage, grocery store rage, and lots of parent rage at kids sporting events. Parent behavior is appalling. This has led scientists to say the United States is in the middle of an anger epidemic. This epidemic rattles both those who study social trends and parents who fear the country is at a cultural precipice. And now we have added a new and even more deadly form of violence in the form of terrorism. Men and even boys with automatic weapons take out their anger and rage by**

**killing scores of innocent people in schools, churches, theaters, sports arenas and concerts. Where will it all end?**

**Human beings are practically the only species on earth emotionally capable of killing their own kind. If any evidence were needed of man's fallen nature, it is here. When bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander get hold of us, we are not only less than the angels, we are less than animals. Who among us has not seen a normally intelligent, responsible human being act like an absolute idiot when out of control with rage? What is happening to us? Is there any hope that the carnage will end soon.**

**Bitterness, rage and anger are dangerous emotions for our health. Bitterness, rage and anger are dangerous to those who have offended us. One of the saddest outcomes of our inability to control our rage is the damage it can do to those closest to us. An article titled "Saving the Family," in *Newsweek* magazine describes the American home as the most dangerous place to be outside of war and riots. Why does the article say this? Listen to these alarming statistics: Thirty percent of all American couples experience some form of domestic violence; two million couples use lethal weapons on each other each year; 20% of all police officers who are killed in the line of duty are killed in answering calls for domestic violence, family fights. It is**

estimated that 6 to 15 million women are battered in the U.S. each year probably the highest unreported crime in the country. Even on a much less violent level, relationships are damaged when we let our emotions get out of control.

I'll give you a humorous example of the effect of anger in my own life. When my oldest son Brian was a senior in high school he would park his truck in the driveway of our home. I always told Brian to park the truck out on the street. Nobody could get in or out of their driveway because Brian's truck was big enough to go to war. One freezing day, I come home from Stop & Shop with a car load of groceries to find Brian's truck in the middle of the driveway blocking the entrance to the garage and the door leading into the kitchen. Here's the rub. He had left with a friend and took the keys to the truck with him. I was perturbed. Three hours later, Brian shows up and I'm just waiting for him. I walked out of the house to greet him. I didn't leave Brian in doubt about what he had done wrong and how I felt about it. As I'm walking back to the house, Brian ran after me and followed me into the kitchen. Brian said, "Dad, you forgot the last part of your reprimand, you know, the part about 'You're a good kid, I love you and this is so unlike you.' In spite of myself, I cracked up laughing and we hugged each other. Brian never left his truck in the driveway again and I got better at reaffirming at the end of a reprimand.

**My brothers and sisters, tell the other person how much they mean to you. Let them know by your words and actions that they are loved and cherished.**

**Praise them for what they do well.**

**There are times when we are not graceful in defusing a situation in which we have lashed out at a family member. We continually hurt those closest to us.**

**So, here is the challenge for us this week. If we cannot do this in our families, is there any hope for those of us who have difficulty with anger?**

**St. Paul gives us the answer, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God’s example, therefore as dearly loved children and always remember to walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as an offering sacrifice to God.”**

**We follow God’s example.” That is the only answer to “bitterness, rag, anger, brawling and slander. Before I close, let me say this about slander. Slander fueled by gossip is an act of violence. The human tongue is sharper than any two edge sword. So, stop your gossiping. Often, you have no idea what you are talking about. It is sinful. Your slander can ruin a person’s reputation.**

**Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.” Remembering how God accepts**

**and forgives us when we do wrong is the surest way to let go of our anger  
when the actions of others disturb us. We need to follow God's example and  
with God's help let go of our anger .So, how do we do that, We walk in love as  
Christ loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice to God.  
AMEN.**