

Devotion, Fifth Week after Epiphany, 2023

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This past Sunday we talked about the Matthew 5 text on anger. To clarify a little about that topic, it's not a sin to get angry – sometimes righteous anger is called for when we observe injustice. Look at what Jesus did with the money changers in the temple. As I said Sunday, it's not about the anger, it's what we do with it. If we harm others with it, we have indeed sinned. The important thing is to deal with it appropriately. First of all, we need to acknowledge it when it's there, even if it's buried in self-denial. Otherwise, it festers like an untreated wound and harms us. If we don't diffuse it or reconcile with the causes of it, it can grow into resentment, bitterness, or destructive rage.

Ephesians says this:

“Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry – but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.”

Anger can eat us alive from the inside out. If we don't deal with it appropriately, we become sick – often physically as well as emotionally. So talk it out, work it out, get rid of it, and let others help you with the pain of what caused it in the first place, if necessary. Turn the issue that caused it over to God and ask for help in dealing with it. You don't need to deny that the hurt happened – you need to move beyond it.

Every so often in my work years ago, we would get into disagreements in a meeting, and I would suddenly say, “OK, on the count of three, everybody scream as loud as you can.” That helped remarkably to lower tensions. We would then all laugh, agree that the disagreements had gotten out of hand, and would start listening a little better to each other. I have also found over the years that occasionally going into the bathroom, screaming as loud as I can down into the toilet, and then flushing it seems to work wonders. I know this is quite nonsensical, but it's mostly just letting the frustration out that seems to help calm me down. And when I flush, it is a physical reminder to let it go! So if things get rough, try it! It's a lot better than taking it out on someone else.

This Sunday we will talk about turning the other cheek – not one of my favorite Biblical passages, quite frankly, but one that I need to think about and study. So join me as we discuss the next sequence in Matthew on anger.

Jeanne