



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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A Stephen Ministry Congregation
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Third Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2015

“Taming the Inner Brat”

(Psalm 4:4)

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*“In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices
and trust in the LORD” (Ps. 4:4).*

COLLECT: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raise up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

First thing, for all you Watertownians, the title is not “Taming the Inner Bratwurst.” It’s “Taming the Inner Brat”! This sermon is about anger management. It’s not about Sheboygans!

When a group of 6-year-olds was asked by their teacher, “What’s the most important truth you’ve learned so far?” one girl wrote, “When your dad makes your mom mad, *never, ever* let her brush your hair!” It’s easy to visualize, isn’t it?

It’s also a good insight into human nature. All of us struggle with displacing anger, directing our anger at innocent targets. You name it we can get angry at it. The stop lights that turn red when we’re in a hurry. The person in front of us in the check-out lane for pulling out a thick wad of coupons. The spouse for sniffing and sneezing. The computer for freezing. Often, anger controls us, rather than the other way around. When we’re angry, we say and do things we otherwise would not say or do, things we regret.

The Bible, especially the book of Proverbs has quite a lot to say about anger.

Prov. 29: A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control (v. 11).

Prov. 14: A fool is hot-headed and reckless” (v. 16).

“A quick-tempered man displays folly (v. 29).

Prov. 20 It is a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

Prov. 25 Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control (v. 28).

That's the thing about anger: When you're angry, the fight or flight part of the brain has kicked in. At the same time, the thoughtful, reasonable, logical, creative, problem solving parts of brain shuts down. What this means is when we indulge in anger, when we give ourselves over to it, in a sense, we're no longer captain of the ship. Rather there's a raging fool at the helm. Anger controls us rather than the other way around. When we give ourselves over to anger cold hard logic takes a leave of absence on us. Many people think anger gives them an edge, when in actuality it only makes them look like an idiot. For a moment, letting loose on your anger feels great but relationships at work and home usually need to last longer than a moment.

Frederick Buechner wrote that of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins, "anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll your tongue over the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back – in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback" he says, "is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you" (*Wishful Thinking*, p.2).

Spike Jones wrote a comic love song entitled "Why Do I Love Thee?" One reason is your even disposition . . . always mad. Actually, I've seen too many marriages fail for this very reason: as if one's resting state seems to be anger. Death by a thousand paper cuts.

Of course, we find the origin of anger in the garden. The sin of Adam and Eve is they wanted to be like God, and forever after their offspring have wanted to be like God. As wannabe gods, we think things should go our way. When they don't, we get angry. Adults are pretty good at hiding this idolatry most of the time. Two-year olds don't know how to hide it just yet; that's what makes them so special. In either case, each of us has that inner disagreeable brat within us, right? Can you see then how indulging your anger isn't just a mark of a fool but also a first commandment issue?

Anger is usually an 8th commandment issue as well:

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. Anger has no time for detail. When we're angry, we depict our opponents with as little nuance as possible. We paint them as caricatures rather than as the complex people they are. But there's more. When we're angry, we arrogantly look down on others and judge them in ways that only God can judge. When we're angry we feel morally and intellectually superior.

In short, be very careful about anger. Sin is always lurking in its vicinity.

When you're angry and on the edge of letting loose, there are all kinds of strategies. One is simply slow down. Don't say the first thing that comes to mind. Psalm 141, "Set a watch before my mouth, O Lord, and guard the door of my lips" (v. 3). I think it was Mark Twain who said, "When you're angry, count to 10 before you speak. When you're really angry . . . count to 100." So a great remedy for anger is delay. Ambrose Bierce said, "Speak when you're angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret." Similarly, when you're angry, that is **not** the time to be writing any e-mails, text messages, instagrams or twitters. It's not the time to get on Facebook. Give your phone to someone else. *"In your anger do not sin; search your hearts and be silent."*

Other things can help tame the inner brat. Have you ever tried praying for the one at which you're angry? It's the last thing you'll want to do, but it's even harder to be angry at someone that you're praying for.

You can change your environment as well. Leave the room, give yourself a time out. Each person in a marriage should have the freedom to call a time-out and take five/ten minutes to settle down and take some deep breaths. Of course, you have to re-engage, but hopefully you'll be more reasonable and rational when you do. Exercise also helps. Drinking does not. Remember alcohol lowers your inhibitions, so you are more likely to do or say something foolish.

Now does all this mean that anger is equivalent to

sin? Does it mean the Christian should never be angry? I don't think so. The Bible doesn't teach us not to be angry. It teaches us how to be angry. For there is a good use of anger. We are made in the image of God. God experiences righteous anger. That means theoretically we can too. Our text says, "In your anger, do not sin." That is, get angry, just don't sin. Harness that anger and use it constructively, rather than destructively. Get angry about the same things that anger God.

For example, I don't see Jesus in the New Testament getting angry about traffic flow. And yes, people slowed him down all the time. He didn't get angry at them. He had compassion on them.

I do see him getting angry with the Pharisees who were more concerned about Sabbath laws than they were about helping the sick. I see him getting angry at his disciples who were more concerned about status and authority than they were about serving. I see him getting angry about God's house being turned into a marketplace. But I don't see him getting angry at the things that usually anger us.

If we are going to indulge in anger, why not get angry, for a change, about things that really matter? Harness that anger and let it prompt assertiveness, not aggressiveness. Get angry about injustice, and when you settle down that's the time to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Let it prompt you to address the wrongs and injustices you see around you, calmly, rationally, faithfully. Let it prompt you to make the trip to the polls and vote for someone who will uphold what is good and right. Instead of just getting angry at the practice of abortion, let it prompt you to action, to support with your time and money and service a ministry like "A Place of Refuge" where there's room and welcome for abused and unwanted mothers and children. Get angry and be assertive, but don't be a fool. Proverbs 29, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

If anyone has the right to lash out in anger, it's God.

For we have rebelled against him with our sin. And God could have wiped us out, cleansed the earth of our presence. Instead, he holds on to his anger, doesn't give full vent to it until his beloved Son is on the cross. That's when the Lord finally lets loose. That's where he lets his righteous anger all hang out. That's where he indulges anger and purges the earth, not by killing off mankind, but by sacrificing his Son full of our sin. The cross is where the Father picks a fight, not with us, but with our sin. It's where God becomes like that city whose walls are broken down. At the cross, the Lord isn't exercising proper anger management techniques. He's not counting to 10 or 100, or changing his environment or taking a time-out. Rather, at the cross, he's "smacking his lips over grievances long past" and those yet to come.

Our anger is rarely justified. God's anger justifies. It is white-hot wrath at the cross, but also very focused, focused on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And notice, for his part, Jesus did not vent on Pilate who gave the order, on those who mocked and mistreated him, on the soldiers who flogged him or drove the nails. No, he prayed for their forgiveness.

And when Jesus rose from the dead, he didn't rise up to seek vengeance. No, he used his power and authority to commission his church. Remember? He came to the eleven and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" baptizing and teaching them.

Our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps. 145:8). That should be our goal as well, not to be little brats in the world, but to be little Christs in the world, to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

