

File: Pentecost 14B James 1:19-27

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

You've heard the claims for whiter teeth, cleaner clothes, better hair or tastier food. Claims that cause you to try out a product with high expectations and then you go "Really", it doesn't seem much different than before. Often there's a gap between what's promised and what we experience.

I wonder if sometimes that's also true for the sayings about God: "Jesus is the Answer", really than why do I still have so many questions. Or "Let God and Let God", well I thought I let go and let God but nothings really changed and from our lesson this morning in verse 19 "Everyone should be quick to listen slow to speak and slow to become angry, for a man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires". Sounds pretty good like cleaner clothes, whiter teeth and Jesus is the answer. Yeah sometimes there's a gap between how we actually experience life and promises made.

James tackles this head on this morning as he deals with one of the most significant of all human emotions: ANGER. Like all emotions anger is God-given, we all experience it. But there's a difference between what's called righteous anger and anger over daily stuff. Righteous anger is anger over stuff like starving

children in the world, or that in much of the world though the technology exists there are still people without access to clean water.

In this passage James is talking about controlling the kind of anger over daily stuff. He's talking about our anger so it doesn't become hurtful and destructive and damage our life and others.

Anger when it gets out of control gets us into trouble. And when you add pride to anger it becomes a toxic mix, a cocktail that makes it almost impossible to hear others and God because we become blinded by everything except our anger. That's why in this passage and elsewhere in Scripture we are reminding that it's important to control anger.

Ephesians 4 says "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Proverbs 29:11 "A fool gives full bent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Proverbs 29:22 "An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins."

Anger isn't always fits of rage and yelling and breaking stuff and saying hurtful stuff without thinking about it and venting at others. Anger can also take the form of the silent treatment, it could take the form of hanging onto something and when the timing is just right bringing it up as a revenge thing with someone

else. Anger takes a lot of different forms. But whatever form it takes we know that when it gets out of control it's dangerous.

Why? Because when you lose your temper you can lose much more than your temper. What can you lose? You can lose your job. Nobody wants to work alongside somebody who can't get along with anybody and whose always mad. It amazes me that sometimes we work so hard staying composed at work because we know the workplace won't tolerate angry outbursts but then we come home and just unload on those we love.

Uncontrolled anger can also cause you to lose your friends. Nobody wants to be a friend with somebody who can't get along with anybody. You can lose your health; high blood pressure and depression are scientifically documented results of uncontrolled anger. Uncontrolled anger is like throwing gas on a fire, it will consume you and blind you to all of the wonderful things in life. You can lose your logic and ability to think straight and you can lose your empathy for others. When our anger gets the best of us we have a lot to lose. I saw this one quote where a person said "There's nothing wrong with me losing my temper, I blow up and forget about and then it's all over and their friend replied Yeah but so does a shotgun and look at the damage it leaves behind". Yes there is a lot to lose when it comes to uncontrolled anger.

The question is how do we recognize and admit this very human emotion of anger can sometimes get the best of us and how do we allow God to help us?

The first thing we are called to do is have enough self- knowledge to admit that we all have times when our anger is an issue. 1 John 1:8-9 reads “If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

We need to accept the fact that sometimes we hold onto things in our anger that God wants us to give up. We need to give God permission to change, mold or rid our lives of everything, including anger that hinders us from becoming the person God wants us to be. This is a huge challenge because it requires humility and the ability to admit sometimes that we have been WR WR WR WRONG.

Author Frederich Buechner wrote “Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue 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 is a fest fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”

Here's the crazy thing about anger, when we hang onto it because we want the other person to hurt like we do or we want to cause them the same hassle they've caused us, we're the one whose loses because it consumes us. Perhaps you've seen a relationship where one person is so determined to be "right" all of the times that in their anger to prove their rightness they lose whatever chance they have to be happy. A number of years ago I spoke with a friend who told a story about a wedding in their family where the mother of the groom got really upset over something related to the wedding planning. She felt like she'd been disrespected. So in order to prove her point, in her anger she decided not to attend the wedding or reception only to find out later there was a spot for her at the head table. She was more interested in being right than happy or joyful.

In addition to recognizing when our anger gets out of control another way we can let God help us control destructive anger is to ask God to guard our tongue. In verse 26 of the James passage he says "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" Later in James he compares the tongue to a little match that sets big fires. How true! In our anger we can say some pretty hurtful things and once they're said the damage is done. Oh sure we may feel better but once those words leave your mouth you can't ever take them back, all you can do is damage control.

So ask god to help you anticipate problem areas, ask God to help you understand what people or situations you have a hard time controlling yourself in, of if you've developed a critical or angry spirit and commit those situations to God and frankly sometimes just ask God to help you bit your tongue.

God can also help you learn from past mistakes. Go on a treasure hunt through those bad experiences of when you've been on both the receiving and giving end of hurtful expressions of anger, it might give you some empathy for others. Sometimes the most important thing we learn is that we can do a better job listening when we find ourselves ready to "spout off". Put a little time meter on the conversation and make note of how much you're listening vss. how much you're talking. Because sometimes we discover that our anger is based on unrealistic expectations of someone else or that our anger is based on knowing only one side of the story.

Additionally, let god help us understand that what we attack are problems and not people. Even when Jesus got angry, he did so in a way that expressed value in others. Calling people names like "stupid" or idiot" isn't helpful in fact it's destructive.

Every now and then you'll hear a famous person talking how a parent, friend or teacher in anger told them they'd amount to nothing in life, called them names

or said they were a failure and then they've gone on to do amazing things. That may be true but for every person like that there are millions who are permanently scarred , physically, emotionally and spiritually because someone couldn't control their anger. So fundamentally, it's asking god to help us view the other person as a child of God and then focus on the problem or situation. We may be angry but we must understand that it's got to be anger over a problem and not attack the basic human value of the other person.

And finally, we need to be humble enough to ask for forgiveness when we err. This can be hard especially when our pride gets in the way, and especially hard in our family setting. Nobody likes to admit they are wrong or made a mistake. One of the most powerful things we can do is by the power of God ask another for forgiveness. Not "Hey, I'm sorry" but "will you forgive me".

Yeah anger can be a tough one. It can be tough because maybe there are lifelong patterns of destructive anger. For some, the only model for dealing with anger growing up might have been yelling, throwing stuff or name calling or the silent treatment or in some cases physical abuse. We may have never had a role model for dealing with anger in a healthy way. Whether for those or other reasons we can always come up with reasons why it's someone else's fault that we can't control our anger. But ultimately each of us is responsible for our own actions and

we are called to deal with our anger destructively and take it to God and heed the Lord's advice.

This passage is calling us to surrender our temper and destructive anger to God. It's calling us to NOT believe the lie that say "You can't change". The truth is you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you---Philippians 4:13. Whether it's with professional help, I have a friend who took an anger management course and it saved his life and marriage, or whether it's through a book that give you helpful things on how to deal with certain situations, God can change us and our attitudes. God can change us from the inside out and it all begins when we come in humility to the foot of the cross and the empty tomb and see what he had some for us. This morning ,Give God permission to begin working on you, surrender your anger to him because life is way too short to let anger control and consume us.

Prayer, Lord take me as you find me, all my fears and failures and anger, fill my life again with the joy of the Lord....In Jesus name Amen!