

**Recycling Anger**  
**John 2:12-17, James 1:19-22**

Friends, the great protestant reformer Martin Luther - not to be confused with Martin Luther King... once wrote "when I am angry I can write, pray and preach well, for then my whole temperature is quickened, my understanding is sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temptations depart"

Friends, any great reformer or advocate for change in a corrupt system, especially the likes of Dr. King, would agree with that statement.

Anger can motivate us to take a stand for what is right and fight against injustice.

However the philosopher Aristotle once said "Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."

I'm sure we would agree... our experience tells us that it's not easy for anger be used constructively.

And personally I think that we tend to experience the negative side of anger on a much more regular basis than we do the constructive side.

Take these last verses of another poem on anger that I was considering using in our confession time....

Anger you have messed up my life  
Anger you have destroyed who I am inside and out  
Anger you are the devil  
Anger you are all that is bad  
This anger I have in me has made me fight  
A fight that was not worth it

Anger you made me hit the wrong person  
Anger you made me do the wrong things  
Anger you are the feeling that I would never miss  
Anger you have caused me so much sorrow  
Anger you have caused nothing but grief.  
Anger just go away

This was written by someone who has done some things in anger that they will regret forever... which seems to have destroyed a relationship that was important to them... Resulted in consequences that can't be undone...

Have you ever said something or done something in anger that you wished later on you could take back later on because it's damaged a relationship? I know I have...

And I think if we're honest with ourselves, our experience of anger probably produces more of these kinds of moments than the kind where we are motivated to stand up against injustice...

And in those times where we are standing up against injustice, fighting for what is right... it can be easy to get caught up in the moral outrage of the moment, and forgo a careful examination of the situation so that we fully understand what is going on...

So friends, I think the overall experience would be weighted on the negative side of things – and this is why Anger – in spite

of all the biblical and modern evidence that it can be used constructively – is listed as one of the seven deadly sins.

But since it is true that Anger can be used constructively, and since we have seen the damage that repressing anger can do to us psychologically and physiologically, because anger will always find a way to be expressed – even indirectly... through passive aggressive behavior...

Anger is that Deadly Sin which really highlights the need for the “recycling” approach that we’ve been learning about. So we need to ask “what is Sin twisting to make anger so destructive?

So for that purpose friends we need to settle on what terms we will use for that which is twisted by sin, and what it becomes when it is twisted.

So I think Jeremiah 10:24 is helpful in this regard. Jeremiah writes *“Correct me, LORD, but only with justice— not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.”*

So here we see anger and justice being contrasted and I think that is helpful for us to consider that it is our desire for Justice that gets twisted into destructive anger.

Now I don't mean to suggest in any way that God is affected by Sin – in this context Jeremiah realizes that his sin and Israel's covenant unfaithfulness are so offensive to God that it makes God angry and He would be completely justified in destroying them.

We may not understand why this is so offensive to God and why it would make God want to destroy people... but that's because ***we aren't God***... feeling and understanding what God is feeling in this situation is a bit beyond us.

We might have a little glimpse of it when we are wronged by someone and we want to see them hurt in return or see them reduced to nothing because of what they have done – but again... even that glimpse is touched by sin – whereas God is not.

This is why scripture warns us that *“man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”* (James 1:19)

And the apostle Paul encourages us by saying *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ”* (Rom 12:18-19)

So friends, while we may not fully understand God's anger, and in fact it may frighten us to know that God can eventually get that angry and it might terrify us to realize that in His anger God is justified in bringing destruction...

Ironically this is what can help us recycle our own anger to recover our desire for Justice and use it in a way that honors God, and restores relationships rather than destroys them.

You see while we like to think about God and dress God up according to our modern sensibilities, to make him more attractive to people and so we downplay his eventual anger,

his wrath and vengeance... which works well in trying to sell him to polite middle-class society.

If you've been raped, if you've been beaten, if you've been forced out of your home, if you've been screwed over in court, if you've been falsely accused, if you've been harassed, if you are the underdog and the oppressed...

If you have experienced even a little bit of the consequences of what Sin does to our world, then the nice, friendly, chummy God we've presented to people comes up short!

Because a friendly chummy God isn't really someone we can appeal to, He isn't someone who will take up our cause and fight for us...

But the God of the scriptures does get angry and he does take vengeance and we can bring our anger to him about the consequences of sin and the evil that affects this world and how it has affected us.

God's perfect anger, his wrath, his judgment, his vengeance allows us to take whatever wrongs we have experienced, or will experience in this life and through prayer, entrust them in his care.

Psalm 64:11-12 says *"One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what they have done."*

God in his perfect knowledge and goodness can sort through them, and will sort through them, and determine what these wrongs are deserving of, and do so in perfect fairness and equality – and that is important friends.

Especially if you ever paid someone back in your anger and then realized that in doing so you had become more of a monster than what they ever had been to you.

God will sort out all the wrongs that have been done in perfect fairness according to what they deserve

King David knew this and so He brought his anger to God many times in the Psalms... listen to what he writes in Ps 69:22-29

*May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap.*

*May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.*

*Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.*

*May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents.*

*For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt.*

*Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation.*

*May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.*

*I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me*

You know, before he became King, David endured a whole lot of injustice – yet later on as King he was never characterized by anger or vengeance... because friends He could take his anger to God and vent it to him in prayer, in the Psalms he wrote, and left it with God to deal with the injustices.

And that's what we need to do as well if we are going to recycle the deadly sin of Anger. Maybe it helps to do this simply by reading the Psalms that express anger to God...

So friends... up to this point we've talked a whole lot about anger, destructive anger and we've pointed out that anger happens when Sin twists our desire for Justice. But what about Justice?

We need to talk about our desire for Justice as well; otherwise giving our anger over to God is just a spiritual repression technique, instead recycling our anger should bring us back to that God given desire for justice that we have.

Now I know that there is a lot of buzz going on these days about “social justice, natural justice, restorative justice, retributive justice” and which is really true justice, which is the better kind of justice, and all that sort of stuff...

Instead I like the word the bible uses for justice in Jeremiah 10:24. “*Mishpat*” and it’s all about God’s laws, God’s rulings, God’s decisions, because when your starting point is God - as opposed to society, the natural world, relationships or punishment – I think you’re getting off to a much better start...

So When Jeremiah appeals to God to deal with him according to his justice, his *mishpat*... He is asking that God be guided by the Covenant terms and conditions that God had set-up between himself and Israel.

So friends, we can take from this that our desire for justice needs to be guided by God’s laws, God’s decisions, God’s Kingdom, God’s Word and God’s Holy Spirit – all of which we

become more intimately acquainted with through the reading and study of the scriptures.

This is why James 1:22 says “*don’t merely listen the word and so deceive yourselves... do what it says.*”

When we have to right a wrong, when we have to stand up for what is right, or for others rights, when we have to deal with systemic injustice or corruption, this is where the rubber meets the road – scripture gives us guidelines to pursue justice, will we actually follow them?

And this doesn’t mean that our pursuit of justice will always be polite, passive, non-confrontational, or even non-violent... sometimes following God’s guidance will mean having to confront things and getting up in people’s faces about things.

I get a chuckle out of the E-card that’s going around these days on Facebook which says “When someone asks ‘what would Jesus do?’ Remind them that freaking out and kicking over tables is a viable option”

When Jesus saw that Jews had violated God's command that certain courts of the temple be left open for the Gentiles to come and seek God in prayer, especially around the Passover celebration, He pursued justice for the Gentiles who were being denied access to God – and cleared that space for them.

And later on in the early church, when the Apostle Peter regressed into old distinctions between Jews and Gentiles the Apostle Paul says *“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.”* (Gal 2:11)

There is a time and a place where justice requires confrontation, getting in people's faces, and perhaps even getting physical.

And if that makes us uncomfortable – perhaps that's good – we shouldn't be so quick to want to go to these places if righting wrongs can be accomplished in a peaceful manner - but they are places where God's guidance will sometimes lead us.

And so we are back to James 1:19 *“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”*

Or to put it in more recycled terms *“Maintain **justice** and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed – says the Lord”* Isaiah 56:1

Friends, let me close with a story about someone who could have been very angry and used that anger for revenge but chose instead to pursue justice according to God's laws.

It's the story of Nelson Mandela, a name that many of you are familiar with – and whatever you might think of the events and his actions which lead to his spending twenty seven years in prison, the fact is that he had many reasons and a lot of time to build up anger sitting in jail.

But when he was released and the apartheid system in South Africa came to an end... he was given the opportunity to lead the country and his goal was not to take revenge... but to work for justice, to work for healing.

I doubt this would have been possible for him without the influence of the Christian faith which he credits for sustaining him during his time in prison.

And He turned to Bishop Desmond Tutu for help in having God's laws guide his efforts for justice in creating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Friends, Mandela's story is inspiring, his pursuit of justice extraordinary, daunting perhaps even for us to consider imitating.

But I'm reminded of a quote from The Hobbit where Gandalf says "some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. I found it is the small

everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay."

Friends, we might think we need a tremendous amount of self-control, or will power in order to tame our anger and recycle it and some great just and noble cause to pursue to make a difference.

But the truth is that Christ has sent us his Holy Spirit, and we *"can do all things through Christ who gives us strength"* (Phil 4:13)

So it's recycling our little outbursts of anger here and there and pursuing justice in the everyday ordinary situations of life that will make all the difference.

Friends may our ears hear and our hearts believe what the Lord wants to say to us about anger this morning. Amen

Let's Pray.