

# St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church

2368 Eggert Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150 716.831.1777

Lent 5 March 12-13, 2016

## “Anger: Control It!”

Let us pray.

O Lord God, I humbly place myself before you, for you have made me what I am, and have called me to do what I am trying to do. I have no words to say that have any worth, except those that you give me to say. Help me to hear your words, enable me to speak your words, and help this people to hear them, that the Living Word of Christ may be truly spoken, really heard, and actually grafted in our hearts. All this we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Good Morning!

The light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing and stopped at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The tailgating woman behind him was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration, as she missed her chance to get through the intersection.

Still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her driver's side window and looked up into the face of a very serious looking police officer. The officer ordered her to exit the car with her hands up, hand cuffed her, placed her in the back seat of the patrol car, and took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed into a holding cell.

Some two hours later, an officer approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal things. He said to her, “I am very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car when you were blowing the horn, giving the guy in front of you a nasty immoral hand sign and cursing him. I noticed the **“What Would Jesus Do”** bumper sticker, the **“Choose Life”** license plate holder, the **“Follow Me To Sunday School”** bumper sticker, and the chrome plated Christian emblem on the trunk, so naturally I assumed...you had stolen the car!”

This story contains enough sermon material for a month of Sundays. One such message lies behind the question, “Do we live the Christian faith we claim to embrace? Are others able to conclude that we are Christians by the mere observation of our behavior? Do we behave as advertised?”

But lately, on a number of occasions, another topic flowed in and out of my awareness, coming from the above story for one, television and printed media for another. That topic is “Anger.” In our story, our subject was anything but pleased to be denied getting through the intersection ahead of the red light. The anger we heard from the story just read is symptomatic of a much deeper malady we are experiencing in this country. It has been said that a prominent source of the current national political situation we are witnessing is anger. I have heard this stated on the TV and radio talk shows. I have read about it in the newspaper. I have read about it in internet blogs. From these sources, one is led to believe that, nationally, we are a very angry people! And to be honest with you, I believe there is a serious element of truth to what these sources state.

Some of you may be aware of the internet blog site, “Virtue on Line,” authored by the Rev. Doctor David Virtue, a conservative Episcopal priest from nearby Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who holds a Doctor of Divinity degree. Fr. Ward and I have had the pleasure of meeting him a few years ago. Dr. Virtue began his blog in the early 2000’s, when the Episcopal Church was on its way to making its fateful decision to rewrite scripture. Dr. Virtue travels the world covering events of not only the Episcopal Church, but also our own Anglican Church in North America.

He, too, is struck by the anger manifested by major elements of our society and wrote a short piece about it. Dr. Virtue writes, “Anger. It is fueling and driving America right now. People are angry at Washington. They are angry with our President. They are angry over abortion, gay marriage. They are angry that nothing is being done to solve America’s glaring problems like infrastructure, inequality, and infanticide .... Anger is not primarily a political problem. It is first and foremost a spiritual issue. The Bible is very clear. We are to be angry, but Ephesians 4:26 says “sin not.” End quote.

We are seeing the rising of many spiritual issues here in these United States. Anger is but one of them.

Dr. Virtue is correct. There are many references in the bible relative to anger. 274 times the word **anger** appears in our New American Standard Version Bibles. (I counted every one of them! No I didn’t) One of my more favorite verses dealing with anger comes from the Epistle of James, chapter 1, verses 19-20: ***This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.***

The Greek word for **anger** as used here translates to mean *impulse; wrath*. Anger is a deep resentment; a rejection. We can observe such resentment and rejection on many facets of our culture. We have witnessed this rejection, this wrath, extended towards Christianity, even to the point of murdering those who are believers. You see, anger creates a great deal of physical

tension which needs to be released by taking action. A byproduct of this action is a sense of power and self-assurance. No wonder scripture names anger as one of the seven deadly sins.

The Westminster dictionary of Christian Ethics makes an interesting statement. It stated, "Anger is a fact of human life, and in itself ethically neutral. Ethical issues may be raised by whatever it is that makes us angry and by what we do with our anger. Much of our everyday anger is petty and selfishly oriented. Yet without anger, we would have little motivation to attack what is evil and false in our lives. Anger is an emotion which surfaces when we care sufficiently about someone or something that may be under a threat." End quote. Bottom line, **anger** may be used for good or for evil.

Our Lord Jesus Christ showed what righteous anger is, which is anger not driven by pride or power. In all four gospels, we read accounts of Jesus cleansing the Temple. Every male Jew 20 years and older, was required to worship in the Temple at least once a year. As it was sacrilegious to use Roman currency to pay the Temple tax, money exchanging business became profitable enterprises, exacting absorbent exchange rates from the worshippers. Those selling doves and animals for sacrifice grossly over charged the worshippers as well. Remember that Joseph and Mary could only afford a dove when they went to the Temple. All these events were occurring inside the Temple compound. Imagine such a market place occurring here in the Fr. Amend Hall!

Upon visiting the Temple, Jesus observed the secular and unethical business being transacted before Him. Jesus, moved by the Holy Spirit, manifesting great displeasure in His demeanor – anger if you will - drove out of the Temple the money changers and sellers of the animals being sold for sacrifice. We read in John's account that Jesus made a whip-like instrument made of cords. Wielding such an instrument of persuasion easily leads one to envision a very angry Jesus, afflicting harm and injury to anyone in His way. However, such is not the case. If Jesus was inflicting harm to those he drove out of the Temple, the Roman soldiers, always on patrol, always at the ready to put down any uprising, would have immediately stormed the Temple and arrested Jesus. However, the soldiers' absence from all the accounts given in the scriptures indicate that the actions of Jesus were indeed forceful, but not cruel, thus causing no huge ruckus.

What motivated Jesus to do these things? John records Jesus stating, "Stop making my Father's house a place of business." Matthew records Jesus stating, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a robbers' den." Jesus saw activities occurring that demeaned and disgraced the holiness of His Father's House of worship, a house the Father initially directed Solomon to build. His deep love and respect for the Father's House of worship was the source of His anger, anger dedicated to correcting the offensiveness he observed. There is no evidence that Jesus committed the sin of pride or power in His actions.

The scripture records another instance of Jesus experiencing anger; an instance I believe is very often overlooked. I am referring to the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. From John's Gospel, chapter 11, verse 33, we read that Jesus is standing outside the grave of His friend, Lazarus. He observed Mary and those with her weeping, Jesus was deeply troubled and groaned in the spirit. The interpretation of the crowd's observations of the Lord was that Jesus was reflecting his love of and mourning for the loss of Lazarus. More careful reading, however, leads to a different conclusion.

From the MacArthur NASB Study Bible, MacArthur writes, "The term 'deeply moved' in the Greek always means *anger, outrage, emotional indignation.*" End quote. Jesus, standing outside the grave of Lazarus experienced anger the depths of which we cannot imagine, for Jesus, at the command of the Father created life; not death. And those around him, weeping and mourning, did not show evidence of His promise of the resurrection to eternal life. The death of Lazarus and the unbelief of those around Him was the source of His anger. Not of pride or power, but out of a need to correct fundamental spiritual beliefs. Jesus created life! Jesus came to offer hope. He did not observe hope standing outside Lazarus' grave. Lazarus' resurrection and His own resurrection provides that hope of victory over death to everlasting life.

Jesus' anger was controlled and disciplined. His anger was not born out of protecting pride or selfishness. Thus, we need to take heed in what Paul wrote, "In your anger, do not sin." It is a given that we will experience anger. What is necessary is to carefully monitor the source of our anger and what we do with it; how we handle anger.

This thought brings to mind once again the well-known scripture passage from the Epistle of James: ***This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.***

For the believer, James very well states what our demeanor ought to be in our relationships with others. First we must be quick to hear. Our human initial impulse is to direct communication. Listening, true listening, reaps great results. A troubled spirit truly appreciates a compassionate listener.

James states we must be slow to speak. This does not mean that we ... speak ...very.... slowly .... What he states is that we are to think carefully of what we are about to say. For once the words are out there, they cannot be called back. I believe most of us have committed that sin at one time or another. James then speaks to our topic for today, "Slow to anger." Remember, we stated that anger is impulsive, a knee jerk reaction to a given situation. James is directing us to discipline our anger, to control it. We are not to give in to it, to permit anger to control us. We often may see or experience anger that is out of control. Road rage is but one example. Does such behavior promote the work of God's righteousness? No, of course not.

James' writings reflects Old Testament wisdom of Proverbs. From Proverbs 10:19, it is written, **"When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise."**

I like what the commentary of the English Standard Version of the Bible has. It reads: **"The quick tempered selfish anger of the world betrays the lack of trust in God and the lack of love for others."** This all so true, for such anger has only one purpose - -to inflict pain and suffering on others. And most likely is born out of hurtful pride. It is a given such anger does not change a person's heart. Such behavior is not conducting one's life according to the will of God.

"The accent of love always has more power than the accent of anger," writes William Buckley in his commentary on the letter of James. "And when anger becomes constant irritability, a petulant or crabby annoyance, a carping nagging, it always does more harm than good. To be slow to speak, slow to anger, quick to listen, is always good policy for life." End quote.

When drawing the broad brush stroke of anger that we see in this nation, is all the anger we observe sinful, prideful, selfish? No, but much of it is. What we are not use to seeing, and this may make us a bit uncomfortable, is the anger we see born out of a long history of what is deemed not for the common good. For the most part, this anger is not selfishly motivated, it is not prideful, for there is more of a historical root cause toward a common good. The concern is that there appears to be a lack of discipline attached to this anger. Sometimes, this anger is out of control. And when it is, selfishness, power, control reign, the results of which are never good.

It is a given that I do not always agree with what Dr. Virtue writes, but in this instance, I believe what he has written about this nation's anger needs to be shared. I close with a quote from him:

Dr. Virtue quotes scripture. "The Psalmist declares in Psalm 37:8-9, 'Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.'

"A nation this angry will self-destruct; nothing will be achieved. From anger will flow violence, and, with millions of guns in people's possession, Americans will turn on themselves out of deep frustration."

A personal comment here. One may think that what was just read is off the wall. Did you see what happened at a Trump rally this past week Thursday? A man punched another person for disagreeing with him. This same man stated on TV that he may even be moved to kill him! Anger out of control.

Dr. Virtue continues: "It grieves us that violence has become a way of life with almost daily shootings unheard of in most civilized countries of the world. And the root of it all is anger. And the Bible is clear about what we should do about that.

"So I ask you, as I ask myself, what is our spiritual responsibility to our God, to ourselves, to our churches, and to our children and grandchildren, as they see the anger we harbor and vent? God forgive us." End quote.

Yes, may God forgive us...

Let us pray: O God, pardon what we have been; sanctify what we are; order what we shall be; that you may be the glory and ours the eternal salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen!