

Zion's UCC of Taborton
March 4, 2018
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Ever Get Angry? Jesus Did
Exodus 20: 1-17
John 2: 13-22

It is now the Third Sunday in Lent. We have heard how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, yet came out of the wilderness stronger and with a clearer sense of what God was asking him to do. We have heard how Jesus went up to the top of Mount Tabor with some of his friends and was revealed to them as Son of God. His friends wanted to stay there and just bask in their shared holiness, but that's not what Jesus wanted. He led them back down the mountain and into the midst of everyday life with everyday people. Then he started his journey to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

We know from other passages in the gospels that Jesus was not universally accepted along the way. His hometown rejected him, the Pharisees were constantly trying to trip him up with their questions about the law [at that time there were over 600 laws that a Jew was expected to follow...] and even his closest disciples often did not understand what he was saying or what he was about.

So, by the time Jesus actually got to Jerusalem for the festival I'm betting that he was not only tired and dusty but frustrated and maybe more than just a little bit testy. He was human after all.....and that sets the scene for what happened in today's gospel.

When Jesus got to the temple mount he found the courtyard full of buyers and sellers. It was a noisy market place. Some were selling the live animals that were then required for sacrifice to God, and at a hefty profit. Others were money changers, buying local currencies and giving back the coins that the temple required for offerings. Again, the profit margin was high. And, since these sacrifices and offerings were the only way to establish a connection to God, the people grumbled but went along with it. It was a seller's market.

Jesus walks into this scene and quite simply loses it. He makes a whip out of cords and starts turning over tables. He made quite the scene; so much so that the story was remembered and included in the gospels.

So, what was he angry about? Jesus had a deep relationship with God, like the very best parent/child relationship. He respected God and all that was dedicated to God. He had reverence for the Temple and had come there to worship. It upset him to see all the buyers and sellers haggling over prices; it upset him to see those who had more dealing dishonestly with those who had less; and it upset him to see the mess and disorder surrounding the Temple. But it didn't end with just being upset and angry. Jesus, being human, got overly caught up in his anger. It turned to rage and, yes, violence. Not a good thing, not even for Jesus.

I always like it when I get the opportunity to preach on this story because it gives me a chance to talk about anger. Anger is a human emotion. It resides in each of us. And it has a purpose!

As Thomas Moore puts it in his latest book, **Soul: A Lifelong Journey Toward Meaning and Joy**, "Anger lets you know when something is wrong and that you have to step up and express your displeasure effectively." It is a warning bell. It is designed to make us pay attention.

Once anger has grabbed our attention, we have to resist reacting too quickly. We do not need to lose control. We need to try to figure out what has triggered this anger in us. Sometimes, we even have to take days or weeks or months or years to figure it out. That's where prayer and therapy can be a big help.

This I know from personal experience. As a teenager I could stomp around the house and slam doors like no one else. I could also dissolve into angry tears without really knowing why. And, as a young mother I could fly into a verbal rage whenever I felt like I was losing control of the situation. My sons could tell you stories, but I'm hoping they won't. Konrad has been sworn to silence.

Eventually, as part of my turning back to God and exploring my spirituality, I found the courage to look deeply into my past. I also found people to whom I could talk about what I found there. In my case it stemmed from the year I was molested by an older male cousin and none of the adults I told believed me when I told them. I have to admit he was quite the charmer.....

That year left me with feelings of betrayal, violation and abandonment. I was eleven years old at the time. I didn't know what to do with those feelings, so I did what most of us do under those circumstances; I stuffed my feelings down so deep that I wasn't consciously aware of them and they turned into a deep well of anger.

With therapy and prayer I named and faced my anger. It's still there, but I have learned how to recognize it's arrival and how to deal with it.

Anger can be good or bad. It contains an energy, a vital force, that can be harnessed and expressed in a positive way. However, if we do not learn to name and identify our anger, it can, as a long-time friend likes to say, come out sideways and land on someone who had no part in the original hurt that led to the smoldering anger. The person simply, probably unintentionally, ignited the anger that was already in us. I think we here at Zion's know more than a little bit about such anger.

If you haven't already done so this Lent, take some time to examine the possible sources of your own anger. Pay attention to what the circumstances are when it flares up. See if those circumstances can lead you to memories of times earlier in your life when you might have been subject to verbal, physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Or perhaps you are a person whose anger is more chronic, more an everyday state of being than a now and again explosion. If that is the case, Thomas Moore suggests that you check to see if the creative part of your self is being given enough attention. I quote: "Anger can be a person's creative urge turned inside out....when you can't live your own life, do the work you want and need to do, express yourself fully and exactly and be yourself in a world that wants conformity, then you

will be angry. Your anger will be your creative spirit demanding a hearing after it has been stifled.” By allowing yourself to feed your creative side, you can dampen and maybe, eventually eliminate that kind of anger.

Yet another kind of anger is what I call righteous or justified anger. There was a lot of this kind of anger going on with Jesus at the Temple. This kind of anger comes from becoming aware of a wrong that is not being addressed. For Jesus it was disrespect for the holy ground on which the Temple stood. In our time it might be finding out that a friend is being bullied or sexually harassed; it might be indignation at the way certain groups of people are being treated by the powers that be – think immigrants, refugees, people of color, the poor, the elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill....you get the idea. This anger also carries energy and when released it can provide the impetus to take action and the stamina to stay the course until the wrong is righted.

There are two sides to anger. Learn how to cope and deal with the explosive variety. Learn how to make the best use of the righteous variety. Then, you, too, will be more like Jesus. You will be in good company.