

**ANGER SERMON SERIES, 1**  
**Jesus' Holy Anger**  
**John 2:13-17**

Old Joe was dying. Realizing his time on earth was running out, Joe wanted to make everything right, but there was something very heavy burdening him. Joe was at odds with Mack, formerly one of his best friends. Joe and Mack had often argued over the most trivial things. In recent years they had not spoken at all, their relationship fractured.

Wanting to resolve their many differences, Joe sent for Mack to come to his bedside. Mack graciously consented to visit Joe. When Mack arrived, Joe told him that he was afraid to go into eternity with such bad feelings between them. Joe wanted to clear the slate and make things right. He reached out for Mack's hand and said, "I forgive you for everything. Will you forgive me?" Mack said yes, that he would forgive Joe, too.

Everything was fine and the differences smoothed out. Until Mack started to turn and leave Joe's room. As Mack got to the doorway, Joe shouted out in a gruff voice: "But remember, if I get better, this does not count!"

How shallow and conditional our Christianity. The Bible text for today serves as a good example. This account from John's Gospel is called the story of "Jesus Driving the Money Changers Out of the Temple."

We live in an age of rage. Anger is growing, some of us are consumed with anger. For the next few weeks, I am presenting a sermon series for you about anger because we have built a world that is extremely good at creating anger, but not so good at giving us something constructive to do with our anger.

Today, let us consider Jesus' holy anger and understand that we are called to a righteous, holy anger.

Back to the Bible reading from John, understand that the money changers were not in the actual temple. In the time of Jesus, there were many people who were not full converts to the Jewish religion. They may have believed much of it, but they had made no commitment. As a result, they were not allowed in the temple itself, but into an outer hall called The Court of the Gentiles.

Every faithful male Jew was expected to go to the temple for the Passover. He was also expected to bring a sacrifice, an unblemished one at that, to the temple.

In most cases, it was much easier to purchase a sacrificial animal at the temple. That sure beat herding an animal miles and miles through the desert or trying to carry an animal on the journey and making sure it was unblemished. So, they could purchase their sacrificial animals outside the temple. Easy. Nothing wrong with the system.

To make that purchase, the only currency acceptable for the temple and the temple tax was the Tyrian Shekel. That's why money changers were at the temple. Again, nothing wrong with the system.

So why did Jesus get angry? The purchase of sacrificial animals and the changing of money, sort of a currency exchange, were not forbidden or sinful. In fact, a good case could be made to defend what they were doing with the selling of animals and the exchange of money as religious, even God-pleasing. After all, it was their religion and obedience to God that brought them to the temple in the first place. But what to them was subtle, maybe even innocent and taken for granted, was an outrage to Jesus.

Jesus became angry and upset because of the gouging and the usury taking place in the shadows of the temple. In the very courts of that house that was called a house of prayer for all people, the laws of God were being blatantly broken. The price of the animals was not fair, and the exchange rate was not fair. The entire system was not fair.

Poor people were getting back \$2 for the \$3 they turned in for conversion. Hard working farmers were being gouged for the price of animals for sacrifice simply because they could not bring their own, often paying double what the animal was worth.

The very thing Jesus came to preach and embody was being made mockery of. Instead of loving God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves, they were engaged in meaningless ritual, hollow sacrifice, rote obedience, empty forms of religion.

I don't think there is any way for us to understand just how shocking Jesus' actions in cleansing the temple were to those who witnessed Him. With a cord whip in His hand, Jesus drove out the animals and the money changers. Imagine the commotion and the surprise as He turned his whip and His wrath upon them. As he overturned their money tables, the coins scattered among the charging animals and the running people.

In righteous anger, Jesus put an end to that cliché that is so wrong but seldom challenged today, that the church is really a business. Not the church Jesus gave His life and breath to. This is not a business. If it is, we have turned our Father's house into a marketplace.

Jesus was angry. This is a clear case of righteous indignation. Most of us have difficulty accepting the reality that Jesus was so very angry. We were raised to believe that anger is a negative sinful emotion. We were told to never get angry and never show anger.

Then we read of this angry outburst from the pages of the Bible, and we wonder if Jesus didn't slip out of character. The thought that Jesus acted out His anger is more than some of us care to image. But it is true, it stands in the pages of the Bible for all the world to see.

Anger can be a powerful energy of the soul. Martin Luther said he preached better and prayed better when he was angry.

Coach Rick Barnes talked last week about the need to make one of the freshmen basketball players angry so he would play better.

In the days of Florence Nightingale, hospitals were bug infested and filthy until she became angry enough to initiate reform.

I know a man in our congregation who is recovering from alcoholism only because his wife, after years and years of abuse and heartache, got so angry that she showed him the wrath of God. Her anger saved him, literally saved him from destruction, maybe even an early death.

I have seen a wife and mother saved from being a nagging, ill-tempered person because her family finally got fed up enough to confront her. They all threatened to force her to leave if she did not take stock and change her ways.

I have seen a boy, spared from being a spoiled, impossible, immature, selfish brat only because his parents finally got angry enough and sat on him. Sat on him hard, sharing their anger with him, forcing him to change his way. Now, as a recent university graduate, beginning his career, he would tell you that was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Even God is capable of such anger. We talk so much about God's eternal unchanging love that we picture God as a tired ol' Grandpa, too feeble to discipline us, too afraid of losing our love. Just read some of the Old Testament prophets and you will quickly realize God is not always a smiling out of touch old man.

Why? Because some things are wrong. God may not strike us dead, but God will surely discipline us or at least let us suffer the consequences of our poor behavior. If we have not come around to it, perhaps

this is the time when we stand up and proclaim loudly for all to hear that there are rights and wrongs in life.

- +Providing alcohol to minors, driving while high, providing and abusing illegal drugs, that's wrong.
- +Fooling around with sex promiscuously is wrong.
- +Hurting, bullying and abusing others, especially children, is wrong.
- +Defying your parents or provoking your children to anger is wrong.

A good place to start in any discussion of right and wrong is the Ten Commandments. Do not lie, do not covet, do not bear false witness, keep God first in all things. Those are rules for living.

It is all right to be angry when the rules are broken.

As with our Lord Jesus, there are times when our faith calls us to stand up when someone is wronged. To be angry and to do something about it. To right a wrong and support the wronged.

As we understand the reasons for Jesus driving out the money changers, God's house was being defiled. But that was only half the reason for Jesus' anger. The other half was about the people Jesus had compassion for. They were being taken advantage of.

It is important for those of us who live in this comfortable affluent society to realize that there are times when God calls us to get out the whip on someone's behalf. To speak with clarity through our anger, saying, "No, for the sake of God, no. In God's name, that is enough."

If you aren't angry, you are not paying attention.

When Jesus looks at us, at our church, at you and me, He sees quite a few things that need cleansing; things that need to be driven out; practices and attitudes and false piety that He would like to take His whip to.

Many of us are conflicted by our dear gentle, tender and mild Jesus taking out a whip of cords and aggressively using it. Jesus was angry. Very angry.

I want to be clear here in considering anger. I believe anger is a wasted emotion...unless it forces you to work toward a positive change.

That is why holy and righteous anger, anger in the image of Christ, can be a good and holy thing. Stand up. Speak out.

Most of all, love and serve. Even in your anger, always love and serve.