Knox Presbyterian Church, Manotick April 28, 2024

Prov. 14: 29, James 1: 19-20, Eph. 4:26, Mark 3: 1-6

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**“Angry and Hopeful”**

Solomon taught us in Proverbs 14 that a quick temper and an angry outburst are signs of foolishness in your character. You would be wise to take note and take action against this character default. James teaches us that Christians, those who follow Christ and are not ashamed of his name and person as a primary part of their lives, must challenge themselves to better listeners, slower to express reactions and responses than your average person and slow in expressing anger in chapter 1, verse 19 of his epistle. He teaches us that our anger does not serve our mission as Christians, nor does it achieve God’s righteous standard. And yet many of us, I would indeed include us all, experience anger in different forms and different times.

I think many of us are angry with the state of the church here, with her pastor gone in part because of denominational and doctrinal change. I think some of us are angry at the denomination for introducing divisive legislation and downloading national issues to the congregations. Now we have to make difficult personal decisions because our government has forced us to make them. That can apply to both church government and secular government in its various levels.

Are you an angry person? Don’t raise your hand. Hold that thought, as you might need to rethink your answer. I never thought of myself as an angry person or even a person characterised by angry outbursts. This was because I imagined anger as I experienced my father. I can give you an example. If he didn’t like a meal that my mother made for the family (remember those days when the mother regularly made a meal for the family at which they all sat down together and ate), if he didn’t like it, he would curse loudly, get up from the table and either make himself a cheese sandwich or go to a restaurant, loudly cursing on the way out. That was anger. And I remember my mother telling me not to be like my father, after he was out of the room. And I’m not like that, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have an anger issue.

When we lived in Newfoundland, I would give my daughters rides to Memorial University when they were students there. It was not a long drive, maybe ten, fifteen minutes from our house. And for years I did this. But one day my oldest daughter said to me, “Dad, I don’t feel safe driving in the car with you. You’re so angry in your responses to the other drivers, I’m afraid what you might do. I’m going to find another ride to get to the campus.” And until then, I didn’t think I was an angry person. This was about fifteen years ago. To be fair, I do make comments about others’ driving and when they are unsafe and illegal. I didn’t think I had that bad of tone, but I’m sure I did. In the end, I decided to get some help and took a Christian anger management program with a local Pentecostal pastor. Of course, I’m still monitoring my reactions, and I fail from time to time. But I admitted I need help. Which is something you too need to do, if you have an anger problem. And if you are not sure you have an anger problem, ask someone close to you who will be able to tell you. And you feel safe enough to ask them and receive what they might say. We all need help. We all need to acknowledge our needs. Don’t put it off.

Anger often is set off by a perceived injustice. “That wasn’t fair or right. That wasn’t legal.” We may or may not be right in our perception of what is going on, but the point is what it does to you and to the other person. It often speaks to the entitlement you may give yourself of judge and jury, while expecting others to be gracious and merciful to you. It was those different standards Jesus addressed in his Sermon on the Mount. We may say to ourselves that it is those other people who are wicked sinners, you know: the murderers, the adulterers, the liars. (Matthew 5: 21-37) Then Jesus turns it around and says the person angry with their brother or sister is just as guilty as the murderer. The person who thinks the lustful or inappropriate sexual thought is just as guilty as the adulterer. The person who tries to get out of their promise and vow is just as bad as the liar, the promise breaker, the one you cannot trust.

Anger can come up a lot. Those who receive it can easily discern it as anger. Often it is less discernable by the one expressing it. So I have learned. And anger isn’t always sin. Jesus was angry, and we know he didn’t sin. (Hebrews 4:15) We will be looking again at that passage in Mark 3 soon. Paul tells the Ephesians to live truthful lives. (Eph. 4:25) Jesus tells us in the gospel of John to not follow the devil who is a “murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) If you have a problem telling the truth—that is another area for which you need to get help. Again, if you are not sure if that is an issue for you, ask someone close to you.

Paul continues his teaching in Ephesians 4: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Anger can lead to bitterness and other sins that would be a foothold for the devil, ground gained in your life as a Christian that you have yielded unwisely. Don’t become the bitter person you may have met in the nursing home or elsewhere. Choose to get help. Admit your character defects while you can still work on them, as God gives you grace now.

**Back to the church**. How many people know that congregations are full of sinners? Some of us are really messed up people. We are messed up and our families are messed up. This is probably not new news to you. What is church supposed to be? It is supposed to be a place where those who need healing receive refreshment, renewal, new life in Jesus Christ. But what we often experience is what Jesus called the wheat and the weeds growing together. (Matthew 13: 24-30) Now I am not encouraging you to put your congregational directory into two category of “wheat” and “weeds.” But we have a mixed experience here, as every Christian congregation does. And you know what? That will happen wherever you go. So if you are convinced that Jesus is the head of His Body, the Church and you are convinced that you need to worship Him every Lord’s Day, every Sunday, and be a part of His mission, ministry, active in fellowship and at His table, then you need to know what is most important when you go to Church. What is most important? Answers? …

**Mark 3: 1-6**

Now let’s watch Jesus go to church, well, not a church, but a synagogue, but let’s translate it that way just now. He goes to that place of worship and why does He go there? Answers? … This might include: to worship the Father, to carry on His own calling and ministry, to teach his disciples, his peers and the religious leaders. How does He do that? He sees the needs that are right there. He starts His teaching and healing ministry right there. Let’s look at what the Scripture says:

He went into the synagogue. He saw a man with a shrivelled hand. There’s the need. Now this takes place in a certain political setting. What are the politics that Jesus is experiencing? Answers? … (v. 2) They were looking for a way to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath rules. Was it sinful or against the Law to heal on the Sabbath? No, it was not. But it was against their traditions and their traditions had been elevated to being as important as Scripture. Jesus in another gospel simply asked them if they could pull their sheep or ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath and they could with impunity. But now would Jesus heal on the Sabbath? That was the test case. And (v. 3) Jesus invites the man with the need for healing of his hand to stand up and be a part of the test case. And Jesus, attempting to teach the disciples, the religious leaders and all who were there in church together, asks them what is lawful on the day of worship: doing good or doing evil? (v. 4) It is quite a black and white question. Such questions are not received well today, because there are so many circumstances and contexts that you would hate to make an inappropriate judgment. Yes? Today it is because there is no longer any objective reality and no accountability because all truth is perceived truth and personal truth, not objective truth. But in that time and era subjectivity did not reign. The leaders were afraid to debate Jesus because they probably knew they would lose the argument. So they just stayed quiet. And it was that silence that provoked the Son of God. Now silence is usually what we need today, to hear God. But in that moment, the religious leaders and others were using the silence to plan how to trap Jesus into doing something against their traditions. How did Jesus react? (v. 5)

He was angry. Why was He angry? He was angry because they did not want to hear a teaching on the Sabbath, on healing, or on anything really. His righteous anger was against their hard hearts not wanting to receive from Him what they needed and change in God’s direction. Here was God the Son in their midst wanting to heal and help them, and they didn’t want it. What did they want? They wanted to win the political point of their time, and to discredit Jesus given his tendency to challenge their Sabbath traditions. Do we want to win the political points of our age, in our denomination? Yes. But Jesus wants to heal us and teach us. Has the denomination done us wrong? Yes. Has the Presbytery done us wrong? Yes. That Minister should not have been allowed to reject you and malign you the way he did. Yes, he apologized later, apparently not for what he said. You were wronged as a congregation. And as the former Moderator of Presbytery during those years, 2021-23, I ask your forgiveness for this wrong done to you. Please forgive me. Please forgive the Presbytery. Forgiveness is the way forward. I know no other way beyond the anger and hurt.

Jesus also experienced grief because the congregation had “hardness of heart.” I believe this turn of phrase means that they did not want to hear Jesus teach them and they did not want His healing. Now is our chance to say to the Lord, “Teach me, Lord for I am listening to you and want to do what you want me to…” Now is our chance to say to the Lord, “I want your healing and wholeness in my life, in this congregation and in the whole Church that you see in your goodness. I do not want to grieve you, Lord. I want to go your way.” With Peter, I say to Jesus: You have the words of eternal life, where else can we go? (John 6: 68)

Thankfully, the man with the withered hand was willing to listen to the Lord, wasn’t he? He stood up, when Jesus had asked him to stand. He stretched out his hand, when Jesus had asked him to stretch it out. And He was restored. His hand was healed. Did you think he was happy with that outcome? We don’t know his name. We do know he was the most joyful person in the room. And at the same time, we know who were the least joyful in the room, don’t we?

The Pharisees, the ones who had Scripture memorized, who did lots of things right and the Herodians, the progressives who were very political and were more or less the opposite spirit to the Pharisees in their practice of Judaism, they got together to plan to kill Jesus, “to destroy him.” (v. 6)

Now you know there’s something wrong in a church when there is a teaching and a healing and a full worship service with singing and praise and the outcome of the service is planning to murder someone. We know this, don’t we? That was the outcome of that worship service. It wasn’t pretty. It was the dirtiest of politics and the ugliest of spiritual abuse in a religious institution. They wanted to murder their Messiah, their only hope for salvation. And today we know that it is likely a majority of the population worldwide will reject Jesus. So don’t be surprised if Canada goes more and more in that direction. We need to know the Gospel, to turn our hearts toward Jesus, to say “yes” to Him everyday. We need to confess our sins and turn away from them. We need to listen to Jesus everyday in His word, the Holy Scriptures, as we have listened to Him today. He is our way forward. He is our lifeline. He is our resource to fight the anger that destroys us and our loved ones.

Let us turn to Him anew today. And if I can help, you can talk to me.

Let us pray.