

Sermon *Heal my soul and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee*
(a sermon on how to give your anger over to God in prayer)
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 9.7.25

Jeremiah 18:1-11
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14:25-33

I received a good amount of feedback on my sermon from last week about how God does not want us to hold onto anger. One comment, from someone who I do not yet know on YouTube, asked this: *why can't we be angry, didn't God flood the world in anger?* That's a good question. Let me answer it by talking about the prophet Jeremiah. God spoke to him when he was watching a potter form clay. One vessel the potter was working on couldn't hold its shape. The potter reshaped it into something that pleased him. We read this today as a metaphor for how we are the clay and God is the potter. When it comes to anger, God, the creator of all, can be angry at what the creation has done. Using the potter imagery, God can rework the clay. Metaphorically and theologically, that is how we can look at the story of the Flood with this one large caveat – the clay is not the same at the potter so therefore we handle anger differently than God and, if we think we can be angry like God (and then destroy things) than we are placing ourselves dangerously close to considering ourselves to be God.

Another comment I received, also from YouTube: *Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship.* I agree, Christianity is a relationship. I believe that our Creator is a personal God who wants us to be in relationship with the Lord. That is how I have experienced God, it's how I read the Bible, and it's what I'll be discussing with you today. God is a personal God. Jesus reached out to interact and listen to the people he was around. The Holy Spirit is our animating force that brings us into fellowship and unity with one another and especially with those that we disagree with. I believe this so much that I often wonder if God works in the world outside of relationship. (That's a whole separate sermon)

God wants you to pray. It's the primary form of communication. God especially wants you to share what is making you mad, or frustrated, or furious. God wants to take your anger. When God receives anger from us, when God takes it, there is not a vacuum in its place – that's not how God does it. When God takes my anger from me God replaces it with peace, understanding, wisdom, a sense of equilibrium, and love. God is the potter, and we are the clay. God wants to interact with us, to shape mold and form us, and one way God does that is when we set aside time to talk and listen to God in prayer.

Before I get into prayer with God about our anger, I want to spend a little time with the Gospel lesson. This is a greatly misunderstood passage. I wrote to you about this passage: *Jesus said, unless you hate your mother and father, spouse, children, friends and yes even life itself, you cannot be my disciple.* In particular, the word "hate" is not an accurate or appropriate translation in 21st century English. The word Luke wrote (in Greek) means a different type of love – like a hierarchy. Jesus calls us to love God, to worship and adore God. At the same time, we are to love one another; but not to worship one another, our parents, our children, and not even our life.

Worship and adoration of God is how we love God. The improperly translated word “hate” means to love family and friends and life itself differently than we love, worship and adore God.

The second part of the Gospel lesson is also misunderstood. Jesus said: *you cannot be my disciple unless you give up your possessions*. My university has an active Benedictine monastery and convent in the Order of St. Benedict. The monks and nuns in the order follow St. Benedict's example – he gave up all that he had and created a monastic order. For a few in the Order of St. Benedict, following Jesus costs them all that they owned. But, that's not the model for everyone (otherwise all the rest of us are doing it wrong). If you read the passage carefully, Jesus did not say, “unless you give away”; it reads: “give up”. The Greek word Luke used is an ancient Greek word (which is saying something because Luke's Gospel is nearly two thousand years old) from around the 5th century BCE. “Give up” was what a soldier would do when entering the Spartan or Athenian army. There were wealthy noblemen who joined the army. They didn't give away all their possessions. They did, however, give up the way that wealth possesses them. Likewise, they did not “hate” their parents when they joined, they gave up the possession their family holds on them. In the context of this sermon on anger, I hear Jesus saying that we have to give up that which possesses us – including anger. If anger is a possessing force in your life, or greed, or revenge, or overindulgence, or inferiority or superiority; all those things need to be let go of to follow Christ.

In the Spartan army, a soldier who held onto anger and revenge would not be received. He'd have to let go of it before enlisting. Likewise, God is calling us through Christ, to give up those things that possess us.

My uncle is a potter. When he married my aunt, he was kind of a big deal in the pottery world in Washington State. He taught me about the relationship the potter has with the clay. The potter can only see the outside of a clay ball but the clay (this might sound weird but roll with it for a moment) communicates to the potter what the inside is like. The clay will “tell” the potter if it needs more water, or less water. It will even tell the potter if there is a spot on the inside that needs to be worked on. Once communicated, the potter can then work the clay until it's ready to be formed.

At Camp Huston, an Episcopal camp in Washington State, they brought a potter in to show us how to make pottery arts and crafts. Once we made our clay object it would be baked and then we'd take it home. After I got my clay ball ready, I carried it over to the working area. But, along the way, I accidentally dropped it. The clay picked up the gravel from the ground. The potter showed me how to remove each rock and told me that if there was one little rock left it would cause the object to break in the oven. He, like my uncle, showed me how to “listen” to the clay so that I could remove each foreign object.

We are the clay. Sometimes the gravel of life gets picked up into us. God, the potter, wants us to identify those stones so God can remove them. We do this in prayer. Here is how I go about it. First, I find a comfortable spot to sit or a place to walk in nature. Second, I pay attention to how I am breathing and take a couple of deep cleansing breaths. Third, I pray either out loud or silently inside to God those things that make me angry and why. When I identify each one, I recount how that anger hurts me, or others, or my relationship with God. I then ask God to remove it. And, in

God's time, it goes away. Sometimes it's immediate; other times it takes a while (especially for those things that really possess me that I don't want to give up).

I asked our resident prayer-writer, Barbara, to write me a pray for you all of us to use to guide our anger to God. Here is what she wrote:

Lord, I am sorry for my anger and how it hurts others. Heal my soul and let me be, consecrated Lord to thee. Amen.

I printed it up on cards for each of you to take with you. I invite you to place the prayer in a place where you will see it when you need to de-possess yourself of anger. For some, it's on the dashboard of your car or on the fridge. For me, I have it every time my computer has an update and when I read the news.



If you are willing and if you are tired of carrying around anger. I invite you to pray with me. First, get comfortable. Take a couple of deep breaths. Then, when you are ready, let us pray:
Loving God, I am angry about this today [name what it is]. I am sorry for my anger and how it hurts myself and others. Take my anger from me. Lift it from me so I will feel your love and peace. Lord, I pray, heal my soul and let me be, consecrated Lord to thee. Amen.