

Sermon, *Unoffendable, how God calls us to let go of anger*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 8.31.25

We had a school shooting this this week in Minnesota.

I have been working on anger and God has been working with me on anger and so I wanted to share with you my journey and invite you to consider something along those lines as well. God has made it very clear to me that anger does not actually produce action. I can be as angry as I want about school shootings. It provides no action. We have been told time and time again in this country to be angry and to get fired up and to go do something. That's not from the Lord. Nor is it from scripture despite what you might have been told.

Anger is what produces inaction. Love is what provides action. Love, grace, forgiveness, peace, joy, charity, wisdom, all of those things that come from the Lord are blocked by anger. You might be wondering, but doesn't scripture call us to be angry? And when I bring this up from time to time, and people who are especially knowledgeable of the Bible, will quote Ephesians. And so, as you know, I brought my Bible up here with me today. And so, I'm going to quote to you directly from Ephesians. Paul wrote this letter in Greek. He didn't write it in English. And what a lot of people say is this that Paul wrote, "Be angry, but do not sin." I wanted to take a look at that and I looked at it really closely. The King James version poetically wrote about to be angry and to not sin. And in our English translations that try to hold on to some of the poetic language from King James. But here's the thing. Paul wrote a list of things to not be in Greek. It's this:

Do not be angry.

Do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

And do not make room for the devil.

You hear all the do nots. It's not giving us permission to be angry and then don't let the sun on it. The idea is that anger is an emotion. There are four main key emotions and they all rhyme which is great so people like me can remember them. You ready?

Mad, sad, glad, and frad. Okay. Afraid. It doesn't rhyme, but it's the only way I can remember it.

All right. And so these are all emotions. And emotions are not necessarily truth. Emotions are emotion. They come in and they pass. Ever felt glad and then it passed? Ever felt sad and then it passed? Ever felt afraid and then it passed? Ever felt angry and held on to it forever?

There is something about anger that makes us hold on to it. And scripture says, do not be angry.

Release anger. And if you're wondering, James has something to say about anger. This is the letter of James. He was in charge of all of Jerusalem, most likely the brother of Jesus. He wrote, first chapter, verse 20, if you're interested in following along,

"Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slower to anger, for your anger does not produce God's righteousness."

Now, "righteousness" is possessive so either it's anger "does not produce God's righteousness" or anger "does not produce righteousness for God". Depending on how you put the possessive either way you get the idea. Anger does not do it. Cannot do it. And yet we hold on to it. At least, I hold on to it.

Anger. I've read a book called "Unoffendable". Unoffendable is written especially for conservative evangelical fundamentalist Christians. This author is talking about his own church and his own faith tradition which he says are the most offendable people on the face of the earth. He is saying to them do not be offended; and offended and anger, by the way, are dancing partners; you get one, you get the other. And so, being offended is having a sense of something not being right and it makes you angry and then it makes you want to change things. Or so we are told. But anger does not produce God's righteousness.

Do not be angry. Do not sin. Do not hold on to such things.

I think Christianity is the hardest religion in the world to practice. There is no perfecting it; only Jesus could; but we practice over and over and over again. So righteousness and anger have some sort of connection together. And so I wrote down a list. Here are things that anger does for me:

Taking offense and being angry makes me feel self-righteous. Anger makes me think that I know what's right and this other jerk has no idea what's right. It makes me feel good.

I have another one. The human condition, myself included, like to feel that people are worse than me. I'll say it again, the human condition likes to think that other people are worse than us. Case in point, I have a good friend. He invited us over for a barbecue. He was making ribs. The ribs caught on fire. He burned them. And there was a part of me that was really happy.

I have burned so many ribs over my lifetime that finally I see this friend who I hold with great esteem and here he burned the ribs. And I'm like, "Yay!" Because I like to make myself feel better than others. I'm making ribs tonight. Watch what happens. I'll tell you next week if I burned them.

Back to my list, I think that taking offense has become a national sport. We have our national teams. We have our all stars. There is a whole system out there designed to make us angry and offended. It is a national sport.

Lastly, I live in perpetual shock about the condition of man – of the things we do to one another. I live in perpetual shock which makes what happened in Minnesota so hard.

God's not shocked.

I live in perpetual shock about the way that people drive on Gulf Drive. Just this morning, as the sun was rising, the speed limit is 45 miles an hour and yet you can't seem to go the speed limit because someone is going slow. On the flip side, I've gone 48 mph and have been passed. I live in perpetual shock about driving on Gulf Drive. There could be a mile of distance behind me, yet the car decides to pull out in front of me and then go 32 miles an hour. Anyone else?

Perpetual shock.

Jesus said, "Come to me all you, David, who are heavy laden and I will give you rest." I am not in shock, says Jesus, about how people drive on Gulf Drive. You can't shock Jesus. You cannot offend Jesus.

You might say, didn't Jesus get angry? Sure. Jesus is the only one on the face of the earth who has ever been able to perceive the heart of men and women. He knew what people were thinking

and feeling. I can't. Can you? Do I even know my own thoughts? Can I even perceive what is in my heart? Yeah, Jesus got angry and he cleared the temple. Yeah, God got angry. God has the right to be angry. And what God has been revealing to me over a period of weeks, I don't; I don't have that right. And if I think I have that right, then I'm placing myself in the place of God.

The other thing that the Lord has shown me is with the ten commandments and what anger can do to be able to block love. Anger can block forgiveness, block joy; anger can also animate us to violate the commandments. In anger, people have coveted what their neighbor has. *I work just as hard as that guy yet I can't have what he has?! Anger can provoke that. Anger can provoke a breaking of vows and bonds. Anger can provoke bearing false witness. Anger can provoke theft. Anger can provoke not honoring one's mother and one's father. Anger can keep us from taking a day the Sabbath and making it holy and setting aside for God. Anger can make us take the Lord's name in vain. Anger can make us create anger as an idol. Anger can become our God.*

So what are we to do?

I've been watching what the apostles do in the New Testament around anger. First, they are the least offendable people on earth. Paul can walk into a city. He can look at all the shrines and the deities and all the stuff that's going on and specifically the worship of the emperor himself. And Paul doesn't get angry. Paul can walk into the town of Ephesus and see that they have a shrine even to the unknown God. And Paul takes that not with anger, but with theological reflection. He looks at the shrine and then says, "I see that you've got a shrine for the unknown God. Let me tell you who that God is."

Peter, the others, were arrested. They're in jail and they're not angry. They're praising God. They're singing hymns. They are offering prayers to God to forgive the very jailers that put them where they are, they're unoffendable. And I think that Christianity in the 21st century specifically for us Americans specifically for myself is to focus on being unoffendable or un-angry.

Now angry is emotion. Just like sadness, gladness, frad-ness, it comes and goes. And we can release anger at the same time.

Jesus said: *Come to me all you that are travail and heavy laden and I will refresh you.*

So what about terrorists both domestic and foreign? For me I feel like if I give up my anger about those who wish to do us harm that suddenly we won't be as protected. God has reminded me that an angry firefighter is not a good firefighter. An angry EMT is not a good EMT. An angry emergency room nurse is not a good nurse. The Navy SEALs teach an angry SEAL is not good SEAL. And so anger is not what God is provoking in us to do; it's not something to protect ourselves against those who wish to do us harm. And anger is not something that God will then stir within those who are assigned to protect.

Anger leads to a shortened life and one with less joy and one with less sleep. And so I'm not going to go into all the things about the benefits of getting rid of anger. But I will go into the Bible one more time. And that is if we can begin at the beginning of Genesis. There are some questions that God asks.

The first question listed in Genesis is from the serpent or the evil one to Eve. The first question in the Bible is "Did God really tell you not to eat from any fruit of the tree?" First question. *Did God really tell you that?*

Second question is from God to Adam and Eve. *Where are you?* The next question, *what have you done?* Next: *who told you that you were naked?*

Later on Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden. They're tilling the land. They have two children, Cain and Abel. And the time comes for Cain and Abel to make an offering to God. Cain, who is a farmer, takes the produce of the land and offers a tenth of it to God. And then Abel, who is a shepherd, takes one of his animals and sacrifices it to God. And then God says, this question, the Lord said to Cain, "*Why are you angry?*"

The next question, Cain said to Abel, "Why don't you come out into the field with me?" The question after that, God asked Cain, "Where's Abel? Why do I hear his blood crying to me from the ground?"

Why are you angry, says God?

Am I any better than Cain? Jesus tells us that those who hate a brother or a sister are liable for murder. That in God's eyes, hate is akin to it. And so, yeah, if a guy cut me off on Gulf Drive and I get very angry, am I really any better than Cain?

And so when it comes to anger, God asks us why are we angry? And so in prayer, in a quiet time, in a reflective time, in a place to sit by oneself, which for me this week was sitting over here in that one chair that I love to sit in and just saying, "God, why? Why do this in Minnesota? Why have this? Why have Gaza? Why why why?" And God says, "*Why are you angry?*" My answer: because I expect better from humankind and God says I expect better from you.

So with anger in prayer is the way that I have found for us to release it. I am much more comfortable praying to God when I'm glad. I'm much more and happier to pray to God when I'm sad or when I'm afraid. But why not when I'm angry? Why not? I cannot surprise God. I cannot offend God. So just tell God, open to God in prayer.

When you get up in the morning, when you go to bed, especially at night, tell God all the things that are making you angry. Pass along all of those things.

And for those of you that are saying, and rightfully so, but *you don't understand how much that person hurt me*. God does. God has a very good idea of how much you've been hurt. And Jesus is calling us to him. And especially those who are heavy laden with anger to give it to him. And that his burden is not righteous anger. His burden is to not solve all the problems of the world. His burden is for me not to figure out how to stop school shootings. His burden is that we act in kindness to ourselves, to one another, and to God. His burden is that we bring light to ourselves and to others. These are the things that anger cannot produce. But by releasing in prayer to God our anger, God replaces it with peace.
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.