

**Date: March 7, 2021**

**Scripture: John 2:13-22**

**Title: ANGER AS A DEFAULT ACTION**

James W. Moore in his book, *When All Else Fails, Read the Instructions*, tells about an older woman years ago who was called to testify at a very dramatic trial. “One of the lawyers was famous for being tough and heartless, and he was really badgering her on the witness stand. He shouted loudly and pointed his finger, using all kinds of tricks to upset and fluster the woman. She prayed quietly to God for strength. She asked God to help her stay poised and find the right words. “Just then the lawyer went into a tirade, asking a sarcastic, ruthless question, gesturing in a demeaning way, and shouting loudly.

When he finished, she leaned forward, looked him straight in the eye, and said, ‘I’m not sure I got all that. Could you please scream it at me again?’ James Moore says, “When she said that, the jury broke up in laughter, spectators in the courtroom applauded, the judge even laughed, and the thoroughly humiliated lawyer said, ‘Oh just forget it! No more questions.’

“As the woman stepped down from the witness stand, she quietly prayed again, ‘Thank you, Lord. Thank you for giving me strength!’”

It’s sad, but studies show that Americans are angrier than ever. National Public Radio and IBM Watson Health teamed up to survey Americans on their attitudes toward anger. Eighty-four percent of people surveyed said “Americans are angrier today, compared with a generation ago.” Forty-two percent of people reported feeling angrier in the past year, than they had been in times past. Sixty-nine percent of people surveyed, believe that anger is a negative emotion. But 31% said, anger can have a positive effect, if it moves people to take action.

There are times when it’s right to get angry. Jesus was angry when he drove the moneychangers out of the temple. They had turned a place of worship, into what he called a “den of robbers.”

The moneychangers were originally an answer to a problem, raised by Roman coinage. The coins had on them, the image of Caesar. Therefore, they were unacceptable to the Jews, for Temple ceremonies. So, the people were forced to change their Roman coins, into coins that were acceptable. Those of you who have traveled abroad, have probably traded currency at a little shop, set up for that purpose. It can be a very profitable enterprise, for the moneychanger. But, the moneychangers Jesus confronted, had brought their little shops, right into the Temple itself.

Even worse, they were selling sacrificial animals, right there in the temple. They were clearly running the risk, that an animal might get loose, and violate the sanctuary. Worse than that was, the competitiveness among the shopkeepers vying for the business of the worshippers. The most sacred shrine of the Jews, had become a trashy, commercialized circus. This made Jesus mad and he wasn’t going to take it anymore. This was his Father’s house, and they had desecrated it. Suddenly he was turning over tables, scattering coins across the pavement. Then he took a whip and forced the

traders, out of the temple, and drove the sacrificial animals, out into the courtyard.

When the dust cleared, people probably wondered what had hit them. But, nobody protested. Everybody knew deep down Jesus was right. **Christ's example tells us, there are times when a Christian ought to get angry.** Our anger reveals our deepest values and priorities. The Bible warns us, to avoid people who are quick-tempered, or who get angry about petty things. But anger and love, are not mutually exclusive emotions. In fact, if we are complacent, or apathetic, about the things that matter to God, then we should question, whether we love God at all. If we can look at suffering, injustice, and evil in the world, and not get angry, then we need to question our commitment as followers of Christ.

I read a quote by writer Shannon Leigh that says: "Anger is a boundary; it tells others what isn't okay, and it shows you where your limits are. . . . Anger is like your engine light flashing, a beacon signaling, that something needs care and attention."

Jesus was clearly laying down some boundaries in our Bible passage for today. Jesus loved God and God's people so much, that he was disgusted and enraged by anything that violated them. And using God's Temple, to defraud people, who genuinely wanted to worship God, was despicable in Jesus' eyes.

There are times, when people ought to express their anger at such practices. That's something, a lot of good, sweet, nice, decent people need to realize. When Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, he didn't mean for us to become doormats for everyone to walk on. Certainly, Jesus was no doormat. He drove the tax collectors out of the temple. So, obviously, there are times when we must express our anger. Remember, that even anger, is a gift from God. It can be a great motivating force in life. There's a time for holy anger.

**Christ's example also teaches us, there's a time for action.** Is there some evil in the world, that a voice within you keeps saying, "Somebody ought to do something about that"? Maybe that's the voice of God. Maybe it's time you went beyond anger, to action.

Singer and songwriter Ray Charles tells of having to perform concerts during the days of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Back in the 50s, he was being led into a concert hall in Augusta, Georgia, to perform a show. There were protesters gathered in a picket line, outside the concert hall, protesting that the concert would be segregated. Only white people, were allowed on the main dance floor. Black people had to sit in the balcony.

When a protester got close to Ray, and began chanting "No more segregation!" at him, Charles responded, "Look, man, there ain't nothing I can do about it. I'm an entertainer." He had been raised with institutional racism all his life. He was playing a concert in the Deep South. He was just one man, how could he change the system?

But a few minutes later, Charles heard the white concert organizer, insult the protester. And Charles knew deep in his heart, he needed to take action. He couldn't accept the injustice anymore. So he ordered his band, to get back on the bus, and leave Georgia. The concert organizer threatened to sue him. The state of Georgia banned him, from making any public performances, within state lines. Ray Charles no longer cared.

He was going to stand up, for equality and justice, no matter what it cost him.

Twenty years later in 1979, in one of those great reversals of history, Ray Charles was offered a public apology, by the state legislature of Georgia, and his rendition of “Georgia on My Mind,” was made the official state song. There’s a time for anger, and there’s a time for action.

**This brings us to our final thought for today: unresolved anger is a spiritual problem.** Anger not only affects our health and our relationships with others, it’s important in our relationship with God. Jesus told an amusing but profound parable about a man who owed his master the equivalent of 100 million dollars. His master forgave him his debt. But then this man turned right around and went to a man who owed him about two thousand dollars, and had him thrown into jail for nonpayment.

According to Jesus, so it is with us. God has forgiven us completely, God has blotted out our past, God has accepted us just as we are, and God calls us to forgive others as well. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us these words, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In other words, if we can't forgive others, then we can't accept God's forgiveness for our sins. It's not good to allow our anger to fester and grow. Somehow, for our own sake, as well as for the sake of others, we must learn to forgive. This is the best way, to put holy anger into action.

On April 19, 1995, 168 people died and 680 were injured when two men bombed the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Among those who died, was a young woman named Julie Welch, who worked for the Social Security office in Oklahoma City.

Julie's father, Bud Welch, writes that his world stopped, the day that Julie was murdered. Grief and anger took over his life. As he wrote, “. . . I survived on hate.” Until one day when he accidentally caught a glimpse of Bill McVeigh, the father of Timothy McVeigh, one of the bombers. It disturbed Bud, to see pain in Bill McVeigh's eyes. Bud recognized that pain. Ever since the day of the bombing, Bud Welch had been an outspoken proponent for executing Timothy McVeigh. But after seeing McVeigh's father on TV, Bud stopped campaigning for the death penalty.

In 1998, Bud was invited to speak to a religious organization about his change of heart, and his faith journey, since his daughter's death. The speaking engagement happened to be in Buffalo, New York, the hometown of Timothy McVeigh. Bud had wrestled with the idea, of reaching out to McVeigh's father, ever since he saw him on TV three years earlier. He asked the nun, who arranged his speaking engagement, if she would approach the McVeigh family, about a meeting.

Bud spent the afternoon with Bill and his daughter, Jennifer. They talked about farming, work, and family. They cried together over the senseless evil, that had stolen their children, from them. Before Bud left, he said to the McVeigh family, “We're in this together, for the rest of our lives. We can't change the past, but we have a choice, about the future.”

“We can't change the past, but we have a choice about the future.” Forgiveness and reconciliation, are the tools God gives us to change the future. Jesus got angry about the right things, and he got angry in the right way. He took positive action. But

God knew, that our anger, would too often lead us away, from our relationship with God, and with those who are made in God's image. So, God provided a path for reconciliation, for restoring our relationship with God, and with others, through Jesus' death on the cross. If God can love us so much, that God would be willing to lay down God's life for us, surely we can reach out in love to forgive others, and restore our relationship with them. So, let's live, reaching out to others being Grace Filled people, Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.