

“Spear and Nails Did Wound You”

A Lenten sermon about anger, based upon Exodus 34:7, “He does not leave the guilty unpunished”

Some months ago, the wife of Maryland’s governor said, “Really, if I had an opportunity to shoot Britney Spears, I think I would.” Was the first lady showing a little anger? To be fair, I must add that she apologized for saying that. Do you ever feel angry? Don’t tell me, “Pastor, no.” Listen to this list of words that describe various degrees of anger: “fury, outrage, resentment, wrath, exasperation, indignation, vexation, acrimony, animosity, annoyance, irritability, (and) hostility” (Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, p. 289). You’ve experienced those feelings; so have I. In one way or another we all feel anger, even the most holy among us. Jesus felt anger. Perhaps the best known time was when He chased the money-changers out of the temple courtyard. Anger is a natural human emotion and...this is why I want to talk about it this evening...**anger can teach us a lot about our sin and our Savior.** I’m not preaching about anger just to help you with your interpersonal relationships. The various degrees of anger that you and I experience reveal much about our relationship to God and our need for a Savior.

What happens when you get angry? Two psychologists explain it this way: *Anger is an experience that occurs when a goal, value, or expectation that I have chosen has been blocked or when my sense of personal worth is threatened. This experience involves emotions, physiology, and cognitive processes and expresses itself toward self, others, or the environment.* (Glenn Taylor and Rod Wilson, Helping Angry People, Baker, 1997; p.p. 71-72). Lot of fancy words there, but it comes down to this: **You and I get angry when something that’s important to us isn’t turning out the way we’d like or when we’re not being treated the way we like.** You open a bill and get angry because you have to pay more than you expected. The company institutes a new policy that makes your situation uncomfortable. You want your wife to greet you at the door with hugs and kisses, or you want your husband to come in and listen to your day, but neither happens and you feel some anger. We get angry when something that’s important to us doesn’t turn out the way we’d like, when we don’t get treated the way we like.

So when you feel a surge of anger, **what’s being thwarted? Your will or God’s will?** If you get angry about abortion or euthanasia or gay marriage or so many other things that are going on in our society, you may well be feeling a righteous anger, a holy passion. After all, those things are not in accord with the will of God and the will of God is important to us. On the other hand, speaking here for myself, there are times when I get angry because my wants, my desires, my ego, my big ego has not been satisfied. It’s not the will of God that’s been thwarted but my own will. Do you know what I mean? Do you ever get angry because things aren’t going the way you’d like? We don’t get our own selfish

way and so we get angry. I'm guessing that we all have righteous anger from time to time but I'm quite confident that we all have sinful anger as well. When you stop and think about those cases of anger, that's exactly what it is, sinful. Sin moves us to anger because we're not getting our way. Sin leads us to put more value on our way rather than God's way. So when you reflect on your various expressions of anger and see that so often sin is involved, you understand why I'm not just talking today about improving interpersonal relationships. I'm especially talking about us sinners before our holy God. This is the holy God who will judge you and me.

The story went around on the internet some years ago about **a young boy who had a problem with anger**. Frequent tantrums, stuff like that. His father sat the boy down to talk about it. "Each time you feel yourself getting angry," the father said, "I want you to go to the back yard and take out your anger by pounding a nail into the fence." That's what the boy did, and it didn't take too long before there were plenty of nails in the fence. As time went by, the father saw that his strategy was working because his son was picking up the hammer and nails less and less. So he complimented the boy but he also walked his son out to the back yard fence, put the hammer in the boy's hand, and asked him to start removing the nails. When the boy had taken the last nail out, the father asked, "What do you see?"

"The holes left by the nails," was the answer.

"So it is with us," said the father. "Our anger goes away but the damage we can do when we're angry remains."

When you and I get angry because our ego hasn't gotten its way, we're sinning. **Sin makes God angry**. Let me say that again. Sin makes God angry. God is not some senile old man sitting in a heavenly rocking chair. He is an earnest Father who demands holiness from you and me. Go through the Bible and you'll find many passages that talk about God's anger. God gets angry when you and I sin and pursue our will rather than His will. That's why Jesus, the Son of God, was angry and cleaned out the temple courtyard. The religious authorities of that day were keeping the Gentiles away from the goodness and mercy of God. They were sinning, following their will, not God's will, and so Jesus erupted in righteous anger. It's the nature of God that sooner or later He must unleash His anger against sin. "He does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:7). That's the Law.

That's why Jesus' suffering and death upon the cross is such a holy passion. **Jesus experienced the anger of God against our sins so that you and I can have forgiveness**. That's the Gospel, our only hope. Right before the Exodus passage I just read, the Bible says this: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion

and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” The boy pounded some nails into the fence when he was angry. When God was angry at your sin and my sin, He nailed His Son to the cross.

Jesus’ holy passion teaches us **how to handle ourselves when we feel anger rising**. In today’s Gospel reading we heard that Peter and the disciples said they were ready to fight to defend Jesus. It’s good that they professed their loyalty to Jesus, but their willingness to pull out their swords for Jesus wasn’t so good. Anger puts you in a fighting mood. They were in a fighting mood because they knew how they wanted things to go, not how God wanted things to go. They were sinfully ready to kill for Jesus instead of surrendering their will to God’s will and letting Jesus be taken for the sins of the world. You and I are a lot like that, I think. We do believe in Jesus as our Savior but in the stress and strain of daily living we often get angry for unholy reasons. So when you feel the anger rising, take a time out and remember the story of the nails.

*Make me see Your great distress, anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness and Your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod, **spear and nails did wound You,**
How You died for those, O God, who with thorns had crowned You.*

The Christian thing to do is not put another nail in the fence...or in the cross.
Amen.