

A few verses on from today's Gospel reading, Jesus says, 'You have heard it was said to those of ancient times "you shall not murder" ... but I say to you, if you are angry with a brother or sister you are liable to judgment.'

... are we not supposed to get angry, when we look out on a stressed and unjust world, are we not supposed to get angry? Are we not supposed to be angry when American citizens are shot dead in the street while legally protesting, are we not supposed to be angry when we see or read about young children being detained, or used by immigration enforcement to ensnare a parent, or families being separated, or young children being deported without a parent or a caregiver. Are we not supposed to be angry if we believe the state sanctioned actions of law enforcement agencies are outside the law, or if government agencies appear to be acting outside the constitution.

- when we encounter injustice aren't we supposed to be angry?

If anger with a brother or sister will leave us liable to judgment, then perhaps Jesus might say: "Yes, *and it depends*" ... we're living in a moment when we're surrounded by anger, by fury, on all sides; but not all anger, even anger that seems to rise in response to injustice, not all anger is the same.

If we feel anger in this present moment, we need to be really clear about what that anger's *for*, we need to be really clear about *why* we feel the way we do. Do we truly have a clear sense of our anger's purpose, or what we believe the anger we're feeling will achieve?

These are important things to know, because anger is tricky, and seductive, and it doesn't always serve us in the way we hope or intend.

Anger's a high energy state, when we're angry all that adrenalin pushes us to act. When we're angry we'll often let folks know it – and that can feel like action, and that feeling can be really satisfying. Anger can make us bold and assertive, and that's an alluring alternative to feeling powerless or ineffective. Being energized by anger and feeling like our voice has been heard, our opinion counted, can be so much more satisfying than sitting with the discomfort of a bad situation, it's far more satisfying to get angry and aim that discomfort at someone.

But the satisfaction this type of anger offers is its own reward; this kind of anger, I think, is one type of anger Jesus is warning us about.

Anger is also a really effective way to bring people together. We might notice this particularly at times like these; we might be longing for togetherness, longing to be part of something good and important. Anger, *together*, can be the bond that holds folks together. Being in the crowd at a demonstration or a protest, being angry, together, can push back feelings of separateness, or purposelessness, it can have us believe we truly have come together, we are of one mind; ... and this can feel great.

Anger *together* loves to masquerade as real community and actual unity, but it's neither; this kind of anger is only a veneer, it's not truly transformational or relational.

Perhaps the most dangerous thing about getting wrapped up in these types of anger, is that violence, violence of speech, and, all too frequently, physical violence, violences of all kinds are more or less inevitable – you've got adrenalin, and all the feelings of being more powerful and assertive than we would be without the anger, and in this state we're vulnerable to being triggered, reactive, and, especially when we're part of a larger group, anger can weaponize the way we think, the things we say – this kind of anger makes us want to wield our power, even if it's only the power of our words, it makes us want to wield our power over someone else and bring them down. Violences of all kinds are all too often the companion of this tricky, kind of seductive, emotive anger.

This kind of anger is destructive anger, and I think this is what Jesus is warning us about; when we're swallowed up by this kind of anger, we will be liable to judgment.

Jesus' warning about anger is part of his Sermon on the Mount. Our Gospel reading today is the very beginning of that sermon that's like a concentrated summary of Jesus' teachings to his disciples, teachings to prepare them for the work of the Kingdom that lay ahead, and for the transformation of their lives.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount points unrelentingly to fullness of relationship with God, within God, as it's to be embodied by those who've chosen to live very differently to the way the world would have them live.

Blessed are those whose lives are centered on God. Blessed are those who live for the kingdom, and who find their belonging, their purpose and their life's meaning in that mission – there is real power in living entirely *for* God's reign, and it's for this, that all thought and action in the world must flow if we're to see the true, positive, and lasting transformation we long for.

And the transformation we long for begins with who we are.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus lays out what kind of folks will break the cycle of power and domination, a cycle that's fed by seductive and destructive anger, and the violence that comes along with it.

To be truly united, to be truly powerful, to usher in justice, is to become *how* and *who* we are all called to be by God.

Jesus offers these, the Beatitudes, a way of being in right relationship with God and one another, the way of true flourishing – follow along with me, with these expanded interpretations of the way – being blessed:

by having nothing, no crutch, no relied-on habit of thought or action, having nothing but dependence on God

by *bearing the sorrow* of being part of an unjust, unhealed world without retaliation

by refusing to claim power over another, or even wanting to wield power over another, regardless of the circumstances

by finding purpose and meaning for life only by living in right relationship with God, by living justice, by living covenant loyalty

- by responding to the failure or vulnerability of others with compassion, seeking relationship, always, not punishment or retribution
- by being fully aware, honest with ourselves, about our motivations and intentions
- by refusing to compromise the way of non-violence, despite the difficulty, despite the suffering we might feel
- by being willing to endure the discomfort of living for God's reign and having the courage to step outside, live outside, the systems and habits of an inherently unjust and violent world

Anger that arises from this way of being, true righteous anger, will look and feel very different to the anger that seduces us into believing it's righteous, but actually does harms and destroys.

We should not need an enemy to unite us, an enemy to bring us together in our anger – this is the anger that seduces and tricks us into believing we're acting rightly, but this cycle of anger and violence is unending. If one enemy is beaten, another will pop up and on we'll go. Unhealed, unforgiving, turning to this kind of anger to feel alive. Being tricked by this kind of anger into feeling like we're united, like we're making a difference.

It's not an enemy that should bring us together, it's not the desire to defeat an enemy that should make us feel alive and give us purpose.

It should be love, love of God, love for one another, and love for God's promised Kingdom.

It's love ... and not the seductive, destructive anger that gets us nowhere and causes only harm.

It's love that must drive us into action today, call us to respond with righteous anger today to what's happening in this present moment - and it's love that must give us the courage us to stand up, stand firm and say no to the injustice, and it's love that should have us insist with our voices and with our bodies there is a different way, a better way – if we do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.