

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Language of Faith: Anger
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Youth Sunday, March 24, 2019

Psalm 103:1-13

Anger is consuming.

As you heard Emily say in this morning's announcements, I am in the MRP's production of West Side Story. Our final show is today at 2pm, in Marian's auditorium – tickets are \$10 at the door, but I'm not here to give a shameless plug. Some of you know how competitive landing a role in theatre can be; which is something very relatable to obtaining or climbing the ranks of employment. Now when I was auditioning for this year's production, I was fairly confident in my position. Last year, I was the lead in the Little Mermaid, Prince Eric, and had taken up a leadership role in Choir at Marian. My goal was to receive the lead role of Tony, and I was determined, even a little conceited. I was on my game throughout the audition process. After the dancing and monologue portions, however, they didn't even give me a chance to sing for Tony. I must have impressed the dance coach more than I expected though. Some of you may know, West Side Story is a dance heavy show. With dancing being something I have never been experienced in, I was shocked when I saw the cast list come out; I got casted as Riff, and a buddy of mine got the role of Tony. I was furious - I immediately went into my basement, hung up the punching bag, and unloaded on it. Still have scars on my knuckles to this day. The following days, I used some select words with my friend who got the role over me. I was very brutal with him, and I never knew how much it would affect him. All of these things I didn't mean. I was blinded by anger and I never took into consideration how my friend would have felt, and I was wrongly searching for my own peace. Even though I was still jealous, I made amends with my friend and I have actually really enjoyed my role.

Of all the things in the human heart, anger can be one of the most intense, destructive, and unhealthy emotions that we can experience. If not handled in the proper way, it can have drastic life-changing consequences. Anger may be caused by pressures of work, family or even from being the innocent victim of another's wrong-doing. If left unresolved, anger creates a deep desire to destroy.

Psalms 103 may be the "Mt. Everest" of praise psalms. The speaker here is David, written in his later-life. David begins by praising God for personal benefits, then moves on to God's mercy toward all the people and how even sin cannot destroy that mercy. Slow to anger. He can be angry, and can deal out righteous retribution upon the guilty, but it is his work; his love remains long, giving space for repentance and opportunity for accepting his mercy. That is the grace of this passage, the good news. The Lord's patience to anger with us is a virtue that we can only repay by becoming acquainted with asking for forgiveness. We ourselves must learn from this passage to be slow to anger.

This is the message of anger throughout the Bible. Ephesians 4:26-28 states “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.” What should be taken away from here is that anger is a normal, human response to things that provoke anger. God gave us anger as an emotion for a reason. The harm caused is when we act upon our anger; that is when we are left to deal with the repercussions. This passage also tells us to “not let the sun go down on our anger.” This can be interpreted as an instruction to make amends with our neighbors when we do get angry. Many times, I’ll get angry at someone for something, and through human nature, I act on it. Then my actions cause that person, or another person to become angry. Now we are left with this pile of anger, and the more that time passes sitting on this anger, the larger the pile will grow. This can be due to many factors. Whether it’s lack of communication, past ordeals, or differing opinions, the expansion over time is the bane of anger.

There are also different levels to anger that should be deciphered very carefully. The anger we get when you stub a toe is incomparable to the anger of breaking your phone. The more substantial anger is especially hard to recognize because the anger can be so deep that we are unaware of the situation, or what is at stake. This is rage. I can say I have felt rage only a few times in my life, and they’re intensely surreal. Dealing with this type of anger is something that I struggle with as a Christian. Remember when I talked about hanging up that punching bag? That was my “healthy” way of exerting that anger. Various methods call for: a nap or some exercise – just a way to blow off the steam. Finding what way works for you is important.

In saying that, there can be such thing as healthy anger. We should be angry when our favorite basketball team loses a game, messing up all of our March Madness brackets. I’m looking at you Wisconsin. Anger can also motivate and inspire. In 2004, the Boston Red Sox came back from a 3-0 game deficit to win the World series, an event that would later go on to be on the most incredible moments in sports history. I can’t even imagine how upset those guys were by the end of the 3rd game. But see, they acted correctly on that anger. They translated the anger they were feeling into a positive energy, and it led them to greatness. As unbecoming as the thought of anger is, there is grace, it just needs to be utilized correctly.

Anger is consuming. But, there is a right and wrong way to handle it. God placed anger into us for a reason. We must be slow to anger, and never let the sun go down on our quarrels. We must be mature to anger, and never let it get the better of us. We must be cognizant to anger, and always be aware of the situation.

Thank you.