

Be Angry but do not Sin

Pentecost 12, 2024 - St. Andrew's Kelowna

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The riots in the UK filled our news this week. As I'm sure you heard, 3 children were killed in Southport, 10 others injured, and false information about the killer quickly spread online saying he was a Muslim asylum seeker. This false information lit the tinder of far right and anti-immigrant groups who chose to riot in London, Hartlepool, Manchester, Liverpool, Blackpool, Rotherham, Middlesburgh, Plymouth, Birmingham - and also Belfast in Ireland - targeting mosques and attacking individuals on the street and hotels housing asylum seekers. 600 people have been arrested so far some as young as 11.¹ The suspect arrested for the killings is a 17 years old from Wales. It's all quite scary and sobering and we know the the intentional promulgation of misinformation, xenophobia and violence is not limited to the UK.

In so many places, anger is so close to the surface for so many people and one of the crucial question for us as Christians is : what do we do with our anger? We could change the title of that famous hymn to say: 'They will know we are Christians by how we mind our anger'. What we do with our anger is influenced by so many things: the examples we had in our families of origin, how key figures in our lives responded to our own anger, how we have absorbed the anger of others, the unresolved fear and grief we carry, our own pride, the injustice we have witnessed and experienced. So many things. When you think about anger, what is the best advice you have been given?

In our reading from Ephesians this morning we receive the phrase: Be angry but do not sin. I first encountered this scripture when on retreat with Dominican Sisters hoping to pray through something in my own life that left me with much anger and grief. They so very often go together. At that point, it meant: it's ok to be angry but don't act on it in a way that causes you to do wrong. It wasn't until years later when I found a series of addresses given by Rowan Williams on what the early Church called the Passions that it came to mean something more. And so I'd love to share this wisdom with you and I will quote liberally from his addresses².

The early fathers and mothers of the Church, writing in the 3 and 4th centuries, understood the goal of Christian life to be something called *apatheia* which is living in a state of such clarity that love is totally truthful and you are free living in full anticipation of the resurrection. Therefore, the work of the spiritual life is clearly knowing the movements of our hearts, or the passions, that impeded this way of being. These early Christian writers tell us that what is good about anger is always what makes it dangerous: you can turn your anger profitably against something, righteous anger is a real thing, but it is also an excellent alibi. Anger is properly used,

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg55we5n3xo>

² APATHEIA AND THE PASSIONS: AUDIO TALKS BY ROWAN WILLIAMS
<https://mucknellabbey.org.uk/apatheia-and-the-passions-talks-by-rowan-williams/>

these writers say, against our own sin and the injustice and suffering in the world that can be changed. Anger is given to us so that that we can have an energetic and transforming response rather than being resigned and passive in the face of our own failure and the failures of the world. But no matter the energy behind our anger, no matter what provokes it, it blinds the eyes of our hearts and souls. John Cassian, one of these early writers, uses this image: whether a leaf is made of gold or of lead, if it's is laying on top of your eyes, you still can't see. The gold of righteous, transforming anger or the lead of self-serving, sullen, resentful anger have the same affect which is why we must be so aware of our anger and consistently ask the question: 'whom does your anger serve?'. Anger that serves our own sense of control, righteousness or release - even or especially within the great quest for justice - will blind us, deeply obstruct that clarity essential to *apatheia* and cut us off from our neighbours, marring the image of God in us.

So, whom does your anger serve? That is the question for us. Does it actually, deep down serve ourselves? Or even something more sinister? The Letter to the Ephesians says it bluntly: don't make room for the devil. Whom does your anger actually serve and you'll know by the fruits it is producing in you and those around you. The letter to the Ephesians this morning commends to us ways of speaking and living together that allow the needy to be fed and our lives to imitate the love of Christ: the love of neighbour and love of God together being, of course, the greatest commandment. To imitate that same Christ who did get angry on more than one occasion but whose anger did not blind his Divine love and mission, the Christ who chose to give himself as bread for the world, to share the vulnerability of all humanity so that we might find rest for souls. A deep clarity and rest, a true satiation from the Bread of the Life, that renders self-justification, pride and entitlement irrelevant. A deep clarity and rest, a true satiation, out of which we might speak, act, live and love. A deep clarity and rest, a true satiation, from which our anger can be clearly known and carefully engaged for the loving of our neighbour and the transforming of ourselves, the church and the world.

They will know we are Christians by the way we mind our anger.

Amen.

The Rev'd Canon Anne Privett

From Bread to Bread of Life

Pentecost 11 2024

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In the name of the Holy Trinity, One God, Amen.

I had a wonderful conversation with Sue Sanger from St. Michael's this week about what's been going on in their Food Cupboard Ministry. This is the Cupboard we are collecting non-perishable food for today, it's one of the places the produce from The Gift Farm-Garden goes and it's the Cupboard named in the Farm's byline: "from seed to Cupboard: all is Gift". That Cupboard!

Sue told me how rooms in the Cathedral that were once only used for Cathedral functions are now, on Fridays, full of people having coffee who would likely never set foot in the Cathedral and rarely ever have coffee together. That the Cathedral kitchen, once used only for Cathedral catering events, is now full of veggies from the Farm-Garden. That where they once had people behind tables handing out very Western-diet foods with only English spoken, people now choose items for themselves, there are different kinds of food to choose from and there is a paid translator on site. The people who come aren't called 'clients' anymore, they are simply called 'the Cupboard Community' and a good portion of the volunteers who run the Cupboard are themselves community members. They recently took their name off The Cathedral Cupboard - just like we took our parish's name off the Farm a few years ago- and now it is called 'The Cupboard'. The partnerships with us, St. Mary's and the Farm are being celebrated! Barriers are coming down all over the place - in the people and in the building- as people are becoming aware of systemic power imbalances and assumptions, as people actually become aware of each other, as people become aware of something far deeper at work, of something more than just an outreach program. Sue summarized it all as a movement "from charity to community" which is such a stunning thing to be growing and it pairs so beautifully with all that is happening on the Farm: from charity to community, from seed to Cupboard... from bread to the Bread of Life.

Our gospel reading this morning is inviting us into just this. People followed Jesus because they ate their fill and Jesus is inviting them into a far greater source of life. Speaking to those with full stomachs who will soon be hungry again, Jesus invites them into a Source of Life that cannot be measured by what runs out, rather *only by what is steadfastly given, only by what is a steadfast gift*. And what is steadfastly given is the bread which comes down from Heaven, and that bread is Jesus himself. Today we receive one of the eight I AM statements in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life" says Jesus. The very stuff of life is here to nourish them, Divinity has entered time and space and the Life of Eternity is here to fulfill them and make them participants in God's Kingdom. All of this is happening at the time of the Passover, the remembrance of when God brought God's people from slavery to freedom and here the very Source of Life is holding before them a new exodus, a journey of freedom from sin and death, a bread that not simply fills

but one that fulfills. A life that is understood by what is steadfastly given, not what runs out, which is why John says "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

And it is the 'believing in me', as Jesus says in the scripture today, that is the work we are called to do. It's not a doctrinal checking of boxes but believing as a way of being, a way of seeing, a way of understanding. A way of looking at what is happening through the Farm and now the Cupboard and asking: what is the Spirit of Jesus teaching us? What sort of exodus, (literally "the road out" in Greek), is the Spirit of Jesus leading us on in this time and in this place? How is Jesus' very life bringing us to new life, feeding us, in our parishes?

The Spirit is removing barriers at the Cathedral opening doors and hearts and language and leading the Cupboard on a 'road out' from charity to real community, teaching all of us what it looks like when *God* gathers hungry community around food rather than us alone trying to organize a program. Through the The Gift Farm-Garden the Spirit is teaching all of us how to listen to the land, how to live in communion with-each-other-with-the-land so that we might grow food around which *God* will teach us how to gather and feed others. As as we gather for the Eucharist each Sunday, Christ gathers us around His Table, gifting us with His risen life, steadfastly given to us always, to make communion. This community of the church, fed by his Life, each gifted with our individual ministries and skills, is nourished to then together look upon the world with His love, through His eyes and say: 'There! There barriers are coming down, there people are being fed, there people are living in communion with the land and with each other, there we are glimpsing something of the Kingdom of God that is changing us- growing us into the full stature of Christ as Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians this morning- changing us, opening our eyes, clarifying our purpose, widening our love, while it is changing the world around us.'

From charity to community, from seed to Cupboard, from bread to Bread of Life: *All is Gift*.

Amen.

The Rev'd Anne Privett