

Psalm 109: A Psalm of Hurt, Hate, Trust and Release

Psalm 109, Luke 19:45-6, Ephesians 4:26-7

I began this series on the Psalms quoting Reformer John Calvin that the Psalms were the “anatomy of all parts of the soul.” Sue was teaching Ruby and Naomi that day and they were talking about no matter what you feel there was a Psalm for that. “Happy”, yes. “Sad, yes”. “Thankful”, yes. Then Ruby asked, “What about *mad*?” Yes, that too.

Today’s Psalm helps us bring one of the most hidden parts of ourselves to church and into the presence of God: our hurt and hate, our anger and resentment. What do we do with these hidden and human parts of ourselves? How do we free ourselves from impacted hatreds, festering angers, resentments that have taken up lodging in our hearts?

The word “resentment” means literally to “feel again”. How do we deal with the feelings of hurt and hate that we feel over and over again?

Saint Augustine once said, “Why do we think that our enemy can do us more harm than our *enmity*!” We may think we are managing our anger pretty well, then come dreams that are as bloody as a Quentin Tarantino movie.

The psalmist also asks: What do we do with our anger toward those who injure *others*, who hurt the ones we love? Or, about the structures of sin that oppress and victimize people again and again—and over generations.

This psalm is a beginning. Pray them out first. Vent them to God before you vent them to others. Before you act out, go deep. Know this first: Your hate and anger are safe with God. *You* are safe with God.

I

The psalm begins with a cry for help.

My heart is stricken within me!

I am gone, like a shadow at evening.

Help me, O Lord, my God.

Save me according to your steadfast love.

Have you ever felt like that, hollowed out by what has happened to you?

The psalmist has been deeply hurt by those he loved and trusted. Betrayal is one of the most devastating human experiences. In Psalm 55, which is a similar psalm, the writer says of one who has hurt him:

His speech was smoother than butter,

yet war was in his heart;

his words were softer than oil,

yet they were drawn swords.

(Psalm 55:21)

Now the psalmist lets out a set of curses that could curl your hair:

Appoint a wicked man against him,

let an accuser bring him to trial....

May his prayers be counted as sin....

May his days be few,

and another seize his goods....

May his children be fatherless

and his wife a widow....

May his children wander about and beg....

May the creditor seize all he has....

Let there be none to extend kindness to him...

And he was just getting warmed up! The psalmist now moves to how the person has injured others:

For he did not remember to show kindness

but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted to their death.

A woman came to my office one day and said, “I need help. My hatred is consuming me.” She had been deeply hurt. When this happens hate is the human response.

I said to her “Let’s read a psalm together”, and I began to read the string of curses from Psalm 109. As I read, she and I began to laugh and cry all at the same time. She realized she was not alone and that God was near to hear everything she needed to say. A hidden part of herself was now brought before God for healing.

II

Perhaps next we need to say aloud: Anger is not a sin. It can *lead* to sin, but in and of itself it is not a sin. Paul wrote “Be angry, but sin not.” Being angry is not a sin. Anger may be what you need to separate yourself from one who is injuring you. It may be an assertion of self-respect.

What we do with it is the test, and the test is not to return evil for evil. Paul then offers this advice: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” That’s ruined many a night’s sleep for married couples. Sometimes you just need to go to bed. (These words may prove that Paul himself had never been married.) In its best sense it means: Resolve the anger as soon as possible—but not *sooner*!

Anger itself is not a sin. Look at Jesus. He got angry and turned over the tables in the temple and scattered the money changers. He quoted from Jeremiah: “You have made God’s house a den of thieves.” And Jeremiah was referring not only to those who made money hawking animals for sacrifice; he was attacking the temple officials who made friends with those who oppressed the poor. Religiously sanctioned injustice.

And what about what Jesus said in Matthew 18? “Whoever causes one of these little ones (these children) to stumble, it would be better for them to have cement blocks tied around their ankles and thrown into the sea.” Jesus, the momma bear protecting her young.

So there is a place for anger and hate that is not sin. What can we do with it? First, *pray* it!

III

Here is the spiritual counsel: We must first *own* our anger and hate. If we don’t own it, it cannot be healed and released.

There are all kinds of ways we avoid owning our anger. One reason is that we have been taught in church that a good Christian is not supposed to get angry. So we push it way down. We may push it down, but it doesn’t go away. Have you ever said with a frozen smile, “I’m fine!”

Carlyle Marney, following the psychiatrist Karl Menninger, says that for many Christians the only person we're allowed to hate is ourselves. So when hurt we turn the injury against ourselves. So the advice Marney gives is "Hate expeditiously!" Do your hate-work, and then go on.

In contemplative prayer we are taught how to handle negative, intrusive feelings and thoughts. First we "*resist nothing.*" If we fight against these feelings and thoughts they just get stronger. The second teaching is: "*retain nothing.*" Let them flow in, flow along and flow out. The image is sitting on a river bank and watching a barge of your negative feelings and thoughts float by. Don't jump on the barge! Examine them, but let them float on by.

We need this to be a daily exercise for it happens daily. If they come back around it isn't because you're a failure. It means you are human! Keep them flowing through you.

The psalm teaches us first to own our hurt, hate and anger.

IV

But then the psalmist helps us *release* it. After owning our feelings and thoughts we release them. We release them unto God's Hands whose Hands are far better than our own. "But Thou, the psalmist cries,

But Thou, O God, my Lord,
deal on my behalf for thy name's sake;
because thy steadfast love is good,
deliver me!

Only in God are our angers and hatreds safe. We turn them over to God and say, "You take them, God. It is too much for me to handle." We let God whose justice and mercy are perfect take care of it.

Too many people take on the role of God, becoming holy warriors, Christian jihadists, to punish evil doers. The Islamic term *jihad* means "struggle", struggle against evil. But in Islam there are two kinds of *jihad*. The "inner *jihad*" which is called "the greater *jihad*", and the outer *jihad*, which is called the "lesser *jihad*." One must do the inner work of dealing with the evil inside us before we do the other work of opposing evil in the world. We all take the short-cut. Christians enact what one calls "sacred violence" in the name of the God of Righteousness and Wrath. So some Christians threaten the lives of physicians at abortion clinics. Or, carry large *Jesus* signs to the Capitol insurrection.

We are called to resist the powers of evil in the world, but only as non-violent resistance. Many of those involved in Civil Rights protests and marches were first given weeks of training in non-violence, so when attacked physically and verbally they would not return evil for evil.

V

There is one more important way we can pray this prayer. We can pray it for *others*, for those in our world who suffer injustice, oppression and hatred. For those crushed by the powers-that-be, trampled into the dust. We join arms with them, we bear their burdens. The prayer is a form of protest against things as they are. And now, because we've done our inner work, we can work on their behalf without becoming the evil we oppose.

So we pray with the psalmist

Be not silent, God of my praise!

Deal on their behalf.

Save them according to your steadfast love.

Protect them from those who prey on them.

And then, and then, we can pray as the psalmist prayed at the end of the psalm:

With my mouth I will give thanks to the Lord,

I will praise God in the midst of the people.

For God stands at the right hand of the needy

to save them from those who condemn them to death

So today we join the psalmist:

Praise the God of steadfast love;

Praise the God of justice and mercy,

Praise the God who hears our cries

Praise!

Here is how Psalm 109 teaches us to pray—and live.