

Fr. Tim Gouge
St. Patrick's Anglican Church
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Sixth Sunday After Trinity

Anger, Murder, Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a common theme in pop culture. Songs have been written about it, although songs have been written about the opposite. Don Henley wrote a song called “The Heart of the Matter” where he states:

I've been tryin' to get to the heart of the matter
But my will gets weak
And my thoughts seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness
Forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me anymore

From Janis Joplin's ‘Take a Little Piece of my Heart’ and Carly Simon's ‘You're So Vain’ to just about half of Taylor Swift's music, anger and resentment bleeds through their lyrics.

The feel good family sitcoms of the last few decades seem to teach the idea of forgiveness, but the big budget movies show us

that forgiveness is something for **AFTER** vengeance- usually after killing the bad guy.

Mixed messages are everywhere in our media, and in our social media, we are led to believe that it's okay to burn bridges rather than forgive.

As followers of Christ, we need to see what **HE** says about forgiveness, and apply that to our lives.

The Gospel reading today is from the Sermon on the Mount, just after the Beatitudes. You remember, the 'blessed is he...' statements that Jesus used to tell His followers how they should live a Godly life. He then goes on to say, "I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them." Jesus declared a new understanding of the law and puts requirements for his followers with six statements that start, "you have heard it was said," followed by "but I say unto you." Each of them addressed an aspect of the right relations among people in a covenantal faith community. We are focusing on the first one this morning concerning anger.

Verse 21 begins, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'you shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his

brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, “you fool!” shall be liable to the hellfire.” Let’s unpack those statements to get a clearer picture of what Jesus was saying.

The first one seems easy enough- whoever kills will be liable to judgment. Here’s the thing: killing another person is the epitome of a broken relationship. This is why Jesus said that if person is angry with their brother, the same consequence is required. I would like to note that the Greek word *adelphos* which is used here means not just a blood relative, but a brother or sister in a Christian community. So Jesus would not have us harbor resentment to our Christian brothers, and by the Beatitude “blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,” we should not harbor anger to those who do follow Christ, either! Jesus wants us to reconcile our differences before a rupture occurs in our relationship that leads to that murderous rage.

The judgment for murder mentioned here is in verse 25. “Agree with your accuser, lest at any time your adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer and thou be cast into prison.” Prison was not what we know. It wasn’t

to house debtors or another offenders for a long time. Judgment was swift. Once guilt was established, the offender would be executed, deported or sold into slavery. Harsh by today's standards, but that was the law. And as Jesus was to fulfill the law, mercy was to be extended.

The second statement is, "whoever insults his brother, shall be liable to the council." I'd like to note first that many translations add the phrase 'without cause,' as simply calling someone an idiot or something similar was probably not worthy of the council. But to accuse someone falsely (you know, bear false witness) or call someone an pejorative that would indicate a sinful thing, that was certainly cause to go to the council. The council is referring to the Sanhedrin, which was the highest law in the land for the Jews. They held a lot of sway in the community, and to be ostracized by your community or punished in some other way because of insulting your brother was major.

The third statement, "whoever says 'you fool!' shall be liable to the hellfire" seems a little extreme, doesn't it? In the today's Gospel according to the prayer book, the word "Raca" is used. That word means "vain, empty, worthless." The Jews used it as a

word of contempt. It is derived from a root meaning "to spit." That puts into perspective how egregious that kind of insult was. It wasn't just calling someone worthless, but telling someone that they were not worthy of God's love and compassion.

And so the punishment was the hellfire for those who said things such as that. The term hell-fire was from the Hebrew term 'ge hinnom' or the Hinnom Valley southwest of Jerusalem. There was the cult of Molech practiced the murder of infants by throwing them into the fire. By the time of Christ, the Hinnom Valley was a place of smoldering refuse—a garbage pit. To be sure, it represented fiery judgment.

Not that I've laid out the fire and brimstone part of this homily, I would like to change gears. I want to leave you with hope. I want to show the power of God to change our minds and keep our hearts from being hardened. I want for us to experience the forgiveness that God would us to know and share with others. You see, we are no longer slaves to sin! From the Epistle today, Romans 6:11 says "you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus!" "The wages of sin is death," according to verse 23, "but the free gift of God is

eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We were slaves to sin, with the sentence of death, but no more!

And since we are no longer slaves to sin, we have the free will to choose NOT to be angry. We have the capacity to forgive. We can tap in to the power of the forgiveness of God. Many of you know that I grew up reading comic books and will always enjoy a good graphic story. But my favorite superhero is the Green Lantern. From time that I read the origins and storyline of the Green Lantern Corp, I begin to see something deeper. Setting aside the whole mystical aliens part, the idea that the hero wears a ring of power that is from a separate power source than the ring itself (the central battery), it makes sense to me to see it like this: the central battery represents God, who is all powerful and never runs out of power. The ring that the Green Lantern wears represents the living word of God that is always in our hearts. And wearing the ring, or reading God’s word and praying, I can tap into that power anytime! God’s capacity for forgiveness never fails! He does not run out of juice!

And yet we still allow ourselves to hold on to anger-letting it simmer in our hearts. We must *actively* to diffuse anger and right our relationships with our brethren. The Apostle Paul wrote in

Romans 6:3-4, “are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Glory of the Father, we too, might live in newness of life.”

Many Protestant churches practice baptism by immersion. As the minister dips the person under the water, they say, “buried in sin with Christ Jesus,” and raising the them up, they say, “raised into new life with Him.” It’s a nice representation of being raised up into new life.

It’s not easy to forgive sometimes. It’s not easy to put away anger. It’s what the world expects. But it’s not what God expects of us. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul tells us:

'I beseech you, brethren, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'

That first verse should be familiar- “And here we offer our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee...”

Brethren, let us today make that decision to forgive, to put away anger and unkind thoughts. And let us offer our souls and

bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto God the Father Almighty.

Amen