

Sermon Matthew 5:20-26

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

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Anger Management or Anger Banishment? What does Jesus say?

To ignore what Jesus has to say about anger is much more dangerous than ignoring the stop signs on your way home from church this morning. You might, by God's grace, make it home safely should you blow through a stop sign, but if you spurn God's grace and ignore what Jesus says about anger, you will not make it to your heavenly home.

Jesus says that anger is just as dangerous as the sin of murder. Therefore Jesus urges us to banish sinful anger from our hearts. Jesus then went on to say: "...Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

What strikes you as odd about that statement? Would you have worded it differently if you had spoken those words? Would you have said: “If you are angry with another, do something about it before worshipping your Lord.” Instead Jesus said that if someone else has righteous anger in their heart against you, be reconciled to that individual first before you worship the Lord.

Anger can wipe out our worship. The context of this passage has to do with anger: “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire..” We must be watchful of our words or else wrath will destroy us and destroy others. What Jesus is saying is this: Being reconciled is more important than being religious. Jesus doesn’t just want me to banish anger from my heart; he also wants me to work at banishing anger from the hearts of others!

How does that compare with the world’s way of thinking today? How often haven’t we heard this kind of “apology”? “Well, If anyone was offended by what I said or did, I’m sorry.” I can’t of course look into the hearts of those who speak words like these, but it always strikes me that the message being

relayed is really: “I don’t know why you have such a problem with what I said or did, but sorry...I guess.”

Compare that attitude with a close look at what Jesus said. “...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you...” The word translated as “something” could just as well have been translated as “anything.” In other words, if there is anything your brother is angry with you about, no matter how small, then go and be reconciled. Do we do that? Or do we instead say things like, “I was just joking. I don’t know why he’s so upset. He just has to get a thicker skin.” No, says Jesus. It is not your brother who has the problem, the problem is yours. You have said or done something to upset and hurt another. Out of love for that individual you need to go and set it straight. Offer a heartfelt apology without making any excuses. Resolve it when God reminds you. It is no accident that you are probably thinking about someone you are out of sorts with right now. Don’t dismiss the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in your memory. Remembering is the first step to reconciliation. It is God’s way of prompting you to be a peacemaker.

But does this mean that we should never say anything to hurt the feelings of another? No. The Apostle Paul was very clear when he urged the younger Timothy, “Preach the word; be

instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2a). When we are warning another away from sin we will have to rebuke and say things that may hurt that person’s feelings. But we need to do it with love and caring.

Why do you think Jesus urged reconciliation with a fellow sinner even before approaching God in worship? What do your brother’s attitudes and feelings towards you have to do with your relationship with God? Everything! If matters are not right between you and me, they cannot be right with God either. Bringing God a gift and spending time singing his praises doesn’t give you the right to treat others any way you want. Think of what Jesus said: “ THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” These both are commands, they are not just suggestions.

Do we go out of our way to be reconciled with others? That takes work. It is usually just easier to shrug our shoulders and say, “I don’t know what her problem is, but I can’t waste my time or energy worrying about it.”

What Jesus is saying this morning is clear. Look at how urgent the message is. Jesus said, “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”

The time for reconciliation must always be right now, not later when it is more convenient or easier. Now is the time to settle matters. Why is Jesus so adamant about this? Because tomorrow may be too late! Judgment Day could come to you, or the person you have hurt may be called to glory.

Jesus calls for anger banishment – not just in your heart but in the heart of your brother or sister. We do not want to put off reconciliation with one another because we are all on our way to see the judge. Because God has reconciled himself to you through Jesus, we should go now and set matters right with any person you may have hurt. Banish all anger, not just from your heart, but to the best of your ability, from the heart of your brother and sister. Every second of our life that ticks away takes us one step closer to the judgment throne.

So, does that mean you shouldn't come to Communion if you know that someone has righteous anger in their heart towards you? No, Come and pray to the Lord: “Lord, I know that I have

hurt this person. I'm sorry that I've done that but I need your help and the courage to go to this person. I need your power.” You will receive that courage and power through the blessing of Holy Communion. Come and ask for God's guidance. Ask for his love. Listen to his answer in your heart. God will give you the strength to do this.

If the person rejects your honest and heartfelt attempt to reconcile, let them know that you are always open to talk, and ask God to soften their heart.

Again, it is no accident that you may be thinking of someone with whom you are estranged right now. Remembering is the first step to reconciliation. It is God's way of encouraging you to be a peacemaker.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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Remember the words of our Lord, “It is better to give than to receive”.