

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, August 11, 2024

"On Anger"

Young at Heart Message

This morning, we're going to do a little "thought experiment" related to anger.

I won't ask you to say anything this time, but I'm going to lay out a couple scenarios and, when I ask you a few questions, I'll ask you to just raise your hand in response.

Here is the first scenario:

Imagine that you are driving along the highway.

Someone driving faster than you approaches from behind. They move over into the left lane to pass you.

But then, after they've passed you and moved back over into the right lane, they slow down by 20 kph.

This ticks you off – what was the point of passing you just to move back over into the right lane and slow down?

You feel angry, and you feel like this person deserves to know how angry you are.

So, you now pass them, and then immediately move over in front of them and tap your breaks.

That should show them!

You open your window and flip them the bird as well for good measure.

Raise your hand if you think you're justified in your anger over this situation. Maybe you don't agree with the response, but are you justified in being angry?

OK, now let's put ourselves into the shoes of the other driver for a moment.

You are driving along the highway. The speed limit is 110 kph.

You approach, in the right lane, a person who is cruising along at 100 kph.

You have your cruise control set, and there's no one in the left lane, so you move over to pass the person.

You pass them, and then you move over into the right lane after a respectable distance.

However, you see an upcoming speed reduction sign.

The speed limit has been reduced to 80 kph, so you slow down to accommodate the new speed.

All the sudden, the person that you passed a moment ago flies past you in the left lane, moves abruptly over in front of you into your lane, and taps their brakes, forcing you to slow down abruptly.

Then you see their arm fly out their window and flip you the bird.

Raise your hand if you feel angry about this scenario.

Thinking back to the first driver, raise your hand if your feelings have changed about whether or not you were justified in your anger.

Now raise your hand if you think the second driver is justified in their anger.

Now, imagine the first driver – the one who cut you off and slowed way down to get back at you – had a sign on their back window that said this:



Raise your hand if this changes how you feel about their response.

OK, raise your hand now if this sign changes how you feel about their response:



Would you feel different about the first driver's response if you found out that they had just received the news of the death of a close family member?

Lastly, would you feel any different about the first driver if you learned that they were Christian?

As I was researching for today's sermon, I watched a few different Tedx Talks with people talking about anger.

What I learned was varied depending on the speaker, but one of the things that seemed to be consistent was that anger (whether justified or perceived) and how we cope with it very much depends on the mood we are in or the state of our mental and emotional health at the time.

And this makes complete sense to me, because most days I can brush off minor inconveniences.

BUT, on days when I'm already in a bad mood, every. Little. Thing. Can irritate me.

It also seems that things like stubbing your toe, banging your funny bone, or getting your belt loop stuck on something and pulling you backwards only happen when you're already in a bad mood.

At least, we only notice them or get frustrated or angry about them when we are already in a bad mood.

The Message

Now, I will admit that it took me longer than usual to figure out how I wanted to handle today's sermon, because it does feel as though, as a pastor, I shouldn't *admit* that I get angry – and sometimes, I get angry about little things that really don't matter.

But then I realized – why not? Anger happens to everyone. If you are human, you have the capacity to feel anger.

Now, that said, we also have the capacity to cope with anger and manage our anger, and most of us are reasonably good at it.

However, sometimes, managing anger or coping with anger can be more difficult than other times.

And, sometimes, we are so hurt and angered by a situation that we really struggle to get over it.

Perhaps we end up cutting someone out of our lives, or we end up letting that anger linger in the background for a very, very long time.

And, sometimes, our ability to cope with our anger ends up affecting the people around us. It can also end up affecting us negatively – perhaps by preventing us from opening ourselves up to others, or by simply causing us a lot of stress or anxiety over time.

Anger is a normal human emotion, and it serves a healthy purpose.

It tells us when someone has disrespected our boundaries.

It helps us recognize when we might need to distance ourselves from someone or something.

It might help us realize that we need a new job, or that we need to get out of a relationship.

So, when we are able to cope and manage our anger well, anger can serve us.

So why does Paul talk to the Ephesians about anger?

He starts by saying something that I think is incredibly important to understand:

He says, "We are part of the same body."

This is a blatant reminder that we are all, first and foremost, human beings.

Regardless of where we come from, what our background is, what language we speak, or what we look like – we are all humans.

And, in the case of the Ephesians he's writing to, they are all Christ-followers.

It sounds to me as though perhaps the Ephesians were struggling a bit with anger, or other hurtful behaviours or responses to one another.

So, this reminder that they are all part of the same body, I imagine, almost immediately caused the Ephesians to look around sheepishly at their neighbours and feel a little pang of guilt.

Now, the fact that they are all part of one body and that they are all Christ-followers doesn't change the fact that they aren't treating each other the way they are expected to.

Just like learning that the fact that the first driver in our thought experiment is a Christian doesn't really change how we feel about the actions they took.

The reality is, we might even judge them a bit more harshly because their behaviour didn't seem very Christian in the moment.

This is what Paul is trying to convey:

“Hey, you Ephesians! You claim to be Christians, but your behaviour doesn't seem very Christ-like.”

So, he offers them a few reminders.

Tell one another the truth.

Also, don't get so angry that you sin.

In other words, maybe don't get so angry that you retaliate against someone else.

The scenario with the two drivers actually happened to me a while ago.

I was driver number 2, and while perhaps I wasn't totally innocent in the scenario, I suspect that the other driver didn't realize (or perhaps didn't care) that the speed limit dropped.

Giving them the benefit of the doubt, if they didn't realize the speed limit dropped, then it probably did seem like I was just slowing down to be unkind or a pain.

It may have seemed like I did it on purpose.

But, the other driver is really the one who was in the wrong, whether they knew it or perceived it that way or not.

I am confident that they felt justified in their anger.

And I am also confident that their anger was real - they really felt it inside of themselves.

And yet, they didn't have the full picture.

It is possible that Paul can see a fuller picture than the Ephesians can – they might be too close to their situation to be able to see clearly.

So, maybe they need the reminder to take a step back and “stop being bitter and angry and mad at others.”

We all need that reminder from time to time.

But we also need the reminder to forgive others and give them the benefit of the doubt.

Especially because it just might be the case that we don't have the full picture either.

Paul's final words to the Ephesians reminds them to “let love be [their] guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.”

If we let love be our guide, do you think we would do something like cut someone off and flip them the bird while we drive?

If we let love be our guide, might we give others the benefit of the doubt, or at least be able to put ourselves in their shoes and *try* to understand their perspective?

We may not always agree, but if we are clouded by anger, it will be very difficult to see a situation from anything other than the very place we sit, which might not be the best vantage point to see the full picture.

Anger is an important emotion. I don't think Paul is discounting that.

But I do think he is trying to give the Ephesians, and us, some guidance on how to better manage anger so that we don't harm others as we work through it.

I don't think he's necessarily saying we should not address an issue if someone has done something to us to make us angry.

But I do think that he's trying to tell us that instead of responding with a knee-jerk reaction, we should take a step back, if and when we can, to evaluate the situation and see it from the other person's perspective.

Then, we can share our anger in a healthy way rather than in a way that simply retaliates on the other person.

Taking a minute to collect ourselves may prevent further damage to our relationships with others.

So, let us remember Paul's words the next time feelings of anger bubble up in us, and, at the very least, try to take a moment before we respond.

In Paul's words: "Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. Let love be your guide."

Amen.

Let us pray:

Bread of life, you taught us to put away bitterness and anger, and with tenderhearted kindness to share the fruit of our labor with the needy. Strengthen us by your grace, that in communion with you, we may forgive one another and live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.