

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I remember a relevant story I was told when I was young, which is now part of our family folklore. It began when, as a new bride, my great-aunt put a shoebox on a shelf in her closet and asked her husband never to touch it. For fifty years, Uncle Jack left the box alone, until he and Aunt Norma were getting old and, Jack realized he was dying. One day, as he was putting their affairs in order, he found the box again and thought it might contain something important.

Opening it, he found inside 2 doilies and \$82,500 in cash. He took the box to his wife and asked about the contents. Aunt Norma explained, "My mother gave me the box the day we were married. She told me to make a doily to help ease my frustrations every time I got mad at you." Uncle Jack was touched that in 50 years she had only been angry with him twice. "What is the \$82,500 for?" he asked. Aunt Norma replied, "Oh, that's the money I made selling doilies."

We all get angry from time to time. I don't know anyone who never gets angry. It is a part of the human condition and why anger is addressed so often in Scripture. Anger is an emotion we all experience. It is unavoidable. When we were children and didn't get our way, we may have thrown a temper tantrum. When we drive on the highway and someone is in the left lane, not passing traffic, and going slow, we might get angry. Maybe it's something justifiable. Someone was mean to you or ignorant about life and said something about you. Maybe you are a victim of a crime. Maybe even worse, someone abuses you or has taken advantage of you. Someone has been unjust, bigoted, and prejudiced against you for your skin colour or your religious convictions. These are all reasons why we would get angry.

Today's passage reminds me of something my grade 4 teacher (who happened to be a member of my church) wrote in my report card. "Whenever I

lose my temper, Michael helps me find it quick.” Yes, I had an almost magical ability to get under that teacher’s skin...

In our passage from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we are going to hear what he has to say about anger and what to do and what not to do when you are angry.

This Gospel passage is part of a set of passages in the Sermon on the Mount called the Six Antitheses. Here Jesus contrasts the interpretation of the Law by the scribes and the Pharisees with his own interpretation—the interpretation God wishes the people had known and seen.

So, commandments like “You shall not murder,” “do not commit adultery,” “an eye for an eye,” and “love your neighbour” are exposed. The antitheses contrast Jesus’ ethical demands with those of the Old Testament Law as interpreted by the scribes. Jesus’ teaching and His interpretation of the Old Testament transcend the literal demands of the Law. He surpassed the Law by insisting that one should avoid sinful attitudes as well as sinful actions, showing that the behaviour of His followers is to be guided by God’s own character rather than merely by His commands.

Jesus begins by explaining the Law’s teaching on murder:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ (Matthew 5:21)

They had heard it said from Exodus 20:13 from the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from God at Mount Sinai. “You shall not murder.”

This was expounded and expanded in the next chapter, Exodus 21, which explained further about striking someone to death, who it was that was killed, whether it was with hands or an object or a weapon, if it only injures them, whether it was done on purpose or an accident. The Law laid out the details of what would happen to such a person. Jesus tried to clarify that murder was just

the result of the heart of an angry person. So, he goes on to connect murder to how our hearts should be focused.

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment..." (Matthew 5:22)

Here is the antithesis. Do not murder...but even if you are angry, you are liable to judgment. If you are angry with your brother, you might as well be subject to the laws against murder. Why does Jesus equate these two things? I can be angry with someone but not have ended their life. But this is how Jesus equates it. If we turn to Mark chapter 7 we can see Jesus' reasoning behind this perspective.

20 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Jesus said everything that comes out of a person defiles him. It's from the heart that come those evil thoughts that lead to evil actions. In our passage in Matthew 5, Jesus explains this, and I will further explain.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:22)

Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to hell. That word for fool is not translated in all versions of the Bible. Some of you have transliterated versions which give you the English spelling for the Aramaic word: rhaka. This word means "empty-headed man" or "worthless." This was an insult used to tell someone they had no value at all and should just go to hell. Using this word was telling someone they were unable to be saved and might as well die. It was a

word of murder and Jesus says if you treat people with this level of anger, you yourself would be condemned to hell.

For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

This is what anger does to us. It can lead us to think evil thoughts, and then evil desires and actions can follow when we let anger overcome us. In a timely way, we see that in school shootings. We see that in road rage. We see that in riots. People let their anger overcome them, and people get hurt or killed. This isn't the way the people of God act.

So, what do we do with anger? What happens to anger? I have three things we need to consider. We see it in the passage with letting anger overcome us to the point that we are insulting people, when we allow anger to prevent us from loving our brothers and sisters, when we call people fools and say that person might as well go to hell.

I see that everywhere today. The internet has become a place where we say that it's okay to write people out of your life who disagree with you. That's not ok. Now, I am not talking about people who abuse us, people who physically harm us, people who want to kill us or put us in a bad situation. If you are in a physically, emotionally, spiritually, or mentally abusive relationship, please get some help from a friend or family member. But to write people out of your life because they don't vote the way you do or because you've had a long-standing disagreement with them or because they don't raise their children the way you do. That is ungodly. Anger grows. Don't let that anger grow to where you become someone Jesus would condemn.

We all need to find a way to release and vent our anger in a constructive way. In a productive way. Turn your anger into something positive. Maybe you

could do some exercises. If that’s not your thing, you can scream into a pillow, get a boxing punching bag, or talk to a counsellor. Speaking to someone you trust about your issues can help. Sometimes just talking about your anger or unhappiness can help you release it. Before acting on your anger, take a moment. Some of the most irrational arguments come because people don’t take some time to pause before speaking.

What we see in Scripture is that if you cannot get over something that upsets you, you should go speak to the person. We read that in Matthew 18:

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

The point of Matthew 5:18 is that if someone sins against you, go talk to that person. It may just be a misunderstanding. What does Jesus say? If you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift and go... How often do we think that it is always on the offending person to come to us to reconcile? Jesus says, “you know someone has something against you? Then go find him and talk to him. YOU leave your gift. YOU might not be ready to be in my presence knowing someone is really angry with you.”

Now, I’ve been angry. There are things that rightly have brought me to anger. Watching the church allow itself to die because of stubbornness over preference and legalism makes me angry. On the opposite end, watching the church bring in progressivism in allowing sin and unqualified people take on leadership makes me angry. Watching our children being sexualized at school makes me angry. Seeing a world that willfully allows corruption and won’t call it

out makes me angry. Seeing Satan drag people down makes me angry. Abuse, racism, lies make me angry.

But I have to temper my anger into being productive and positive for change. Otherwise, I am no better than the Pharisees. I am no better than those I am angry at. We find a way to fight positively for truth and justice. It isn't easy. Jesus wrote his Sermon in a way that just made sense. If we look at the other Five Antitheses, we can see where anger leads: lust, divorce, lying, retaliation, hating people who are different.

I don't like to end on a negative. I want us to see the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus. He wants us to stay away from anger because this is our witness to who Jesus is. If we only dwell on the things that make us angry, we are not being the ambassadors to Jesus' Kingdom that we are called to be. So, shine your positive light in this world so those around us can see Jesus. If you are shining your light, you don't have time for anger and malice. Our world needs that! This world needs you and your positive example! When you see anger, pray for them. Amen.