

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity
16 July, Anno Domini 2023
St. Matthew 5:17-26

Beloved Reconciled of the Lord,

We do well to take seriously our Lord's warning about the bitter consequences of our anger, and in today's Gospel, Christ is specifically speaking of our anger against those with whom we share a common faith and with whom we kneel to receive Christ's Body and Blood. Such anger, whether rooted in fact or not, is completely contrary to the Christian faith. We cannot willfully remain angry with another Christian and remain with Christ. Anger drives out the Holy Spirit. If we go to Holy Communion, which our Lord gave precisely for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, while nursing our anger and refusing to be reconciled to our fellow Christian, then we are receiving the Lord's Supper to our eternal judgment - it condemns us. We are withholding from another what we desire our Lord would give to us - forgiveness.

We always like to think that our anger is harmless so long as we don't act upon it. It's just an emotion. It's not same as murder - no one dies because I'm angry at him. And that is true insofar as it goes. Anger that does not find expression isn't dangerous to the one against whom it burns.

However, anger does kill the one in whose heart it burns. Anger is hatred, a desire to pour out punishment on the head of someone who we perceived has hurt us. Anger is rooted in pride in that it reveals the belief that we are guiltless, that our motives and actions have been entirely pure and righteous and the other person can only be wrong, has acted only in malice and selfishness, and therefore deserves to be punished. Now maybe it goes no further than that thought, but that is rare, and it is irrelevant. The fact that such thoughts and desires rise up in our hearts betray our unbelief and self-righteousness. We cannot fear, love, and trust in God and either harbor anger in our hearts or reach out and seek to take vengeance. These are grievous sins against both God and our neighbor and St. John is clear "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life." (1 John 3:15)

Anger at a brother or sister in Christ, or anyone else for that matter, is built upon the assumption that you are better than they are, that they should be shown no mercy or forgiveness, and that you need none. But, be warned, children, it is the opposite. It is the one who lives in anger and refuses to seek reconciliation who will not know the Lord's forgiveness. You simply cannot pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" if you will not forgive or will only be reconciled on your terms. And EVEN IF you can say in this particular instance you have no guilt, do you imagine that you do not have enough other guilt for which you deserve the Lord's temporal and eternal punishment? And confessing that, ought you not humble yourself and be quick to forgive, especially a fellow Christian?

If you are angry at another Christian, whether he or she is in this room or in another congregation, do not let your anger burn for one more moment. We gather around the Lord's altar precisely because we fear the Lord's completely just burning hot anger against our sin and we desire that He would have mercy upon us and freely forgive our sins for the sake Jesus. Indeed, Jesus willingly placed Himself under His own righteous wrath and suffered it's condemnation so that all who believed in Him would be spared. Do you desire God to deal with you as you are dealing with your brother or sister in Christ? Go immediately and reconcile with your brother or sister.

And we need to be on guard in the midst of this cancel culture. It is no better for you if the way you deal with your anger is by "canceling" the one with whom you are angry - pretending that they no longer exist and having nothing to do with them, ignoring their pleas for reconciliation. What a cruel thing to do to especially to a fellow Christian! If someone has sinned against you and genuinely caused you offense, it is entirely loveless for you to become unaccessible to them, to ignore them, and refuse them both the opportunity to know that they have wronged you and the opportunity to repent and receive your forgiveness. Would you want someone who is important you to treat you that way? Of course not! Thanks be to God that our Lord did not take such a demonic tact with us. He did not remove Himself from us. He did not refuse to have anything to do with us. He did not turn the other way and ignore us. Instead, He poured Himself out in love and drew even nearer to us, taking on not only our flesh but also our guilt so that

He could reconcile us to Himself! And in His Christian Church He has provided that our sins are daily and richly forgiven. As the Lord Jesus has washed our feet and cleansed us from our sin, so let us do for one another and gladly, daily, forgive from our hearts those who sin against us.

But let us also take note of an important detail in our Lord's words today. Jesus turns his attention from the one who is angry to the one who, deservedly or undeservedly, is the recipient of that anger. Neither party is given a pass on seeking reconciliation. Everyone is to be on guard against the danger of anger. And I should be as eager to receive my brother's forgiveness as he is to receive it from me. It doesn't matter whether I understand or agree with my brother's reasoning. Knowing the great harm that danger causes the one bearing it, I should seek to still the anger in my brother's heart against me by going and speaking with him, repenting of whatever I have done wrong and seeking his forgiveness. Nothing is to be more important to us than be reconciled to one another in truth. Anger is a pernicious poison that hinders our prayers and eats away at faith and therefore at our salvation.

All of us sin. All of us say things at one time or another, purposely or inadvertently, which cause hurt. All of us do foolish things for which we deserve anger and punishment and exile. None of us are righteous and therefore none of us ought to enter the kingdom of heaven. But, as the Baptized, we know we live by God's mercy. We have received His free and abundant pardon. His forgiveness was not contingent upon our self-flagellation or making a sufficient sacrifice. He offered the only sufficient sacrifice and offers His forgiveness as a free gift. As God has been slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love toward you daily and freely forgiving your sin, be quick to forgive one another, whatever the offense is.

Most certainly, reconciliation comes at a cost to everyone involved. This is what our Lord means when He says "Come to terms with your brother." (Matt. 5:25) If we would be reconciled to one another, everyone must humble himself as one well-aware of his own guilt and failures and be prepared to sacrifice his pride, his reputation, his belongings, perhaps even his life, all so that he may be restored to his brother, his fellow redeemed of the Lord and together they may enter into eternal life.

If you are angry with your brother, go to him and be restored to him. If he is angry with you, go to him and be restored to him. You have been restored to God. He has held none of your sins against you. He has sacrificed nothing less than His life that you may be reconciled to Him, that you may not bear the awful and eternal consequences of your own pride and anger. And let us be quick to forgive one another as freely and completely as our Lord has forgiven us, seeking nothing in return, finding the greatest treasure in being restored to our brother.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.